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Shades of Violence: Aggression and Domination in Indian Culture. Part II. From Inscriptions to Indian Art

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Overview of the Volume

The ten articles collected in this volume address the theme of violence in Indian culture as represented in visual and textual sources that fall chronologically between the Vedic and contemporary periods. They thus continue the theme of the first issue of this year's "Cracow Indological Studies", which focused on various manifestations of violence in textual sources of the Vedic period. Both volumes are the collective outcome of the project, *Shades of Violence. Aggression and Domination in Indian Culture*, supported by the Strategic Programme Excellence Initiative at the Jagiellonian University (EI.JU), which was already featured in the Introduction to the previous issue.

In her article, *Adding Insult to Injury: Whipping Stories from the Mahābhārata*, **Danielle Feller** shows how the motif of using whip on humans can figuratively express insult and dehumanization but also rivalry between the two highest classes of the orthodox Hindu society, that is the *kṣatriya*s and the brahmins. To this end, Feller meticulously analyses instances of narrative evidence attesting to goading and whipping found in the epic, starting with several tales that involve metaphorical whipping, for instance, with words, and eventually the literal, concerning helpless animals and humans. The author aptly demonstrates that in view of the epics and Law books the act of

whipping is usually equated with a low birth for cruelty is seen as a feature of lower class's occupations, and "normal" only when performed on horses and other draft-animals animals by charioteers to speed them up. Therefore, when a human is whipped, s/he needs to be first likened to an animal, i.e. dehumanized.

In turn, **Naresh Keerthi** and **Elena Mucciarelli**, in their contribution, *Split in bhakti, United in bhakti: Violence as Devotion in the Jaimini Cycle of Tales*, approach the theme of violence from the perspective of its interplay between the ritual and the concept of devotion (*bhakti*). Taking a late mediaeval Sanskrit text, Jaimini's *Book of the Horse Sacrifice* (*Jaiminīya Āśvamēdhikaparvan*), and its Kannada variant, the *Jaiminibhārata* of Lakṣmīśa (ca. 1500 CE) as the point of reference, the authors launch the idea of violence as a mode of *bhakti* devotion in the Vaiṣṇava tradition. Their careful analysis of the episode of the Mayūradhvaja with a focus on three readings of *bhakti*-related narratives—*bhakti* as cooking, *bhakti* as division, and *bhakti* as indivisibility—contributes both to the understanding of *bhakti* as operating on many seemingly contradictory levels, and to historicizing the emergence of violence in the Vaiṣṇava religious discurse.

Violence and aggression are further examined under the multifaceted lens of different literary and cultural landscapes by **Ilona Kędzia-Warych** in her article, *Cruel Substances: On "Binding" and "Killing" in the Tamil Siddha Alchemical Texts*. The contribution focusses on the notion of "cruelty" of physical substances in the Tamil medico-alchemical tradition of the Siddhars. The research into the concept of *kaṭumai* is conducted through the analysis of carefully selected passages from the textual corpus ascribable to the Siddhar Yākōpu Rāmatēvar (approximately 17th–18th centuries CE). Kędzia-Warych illustrates how some examples from Yākōpu's production recurrently insist on alchemical preparations performed on various material substances the names of which seems to allude to violent and aggressive actions, as "binding" (*kaṭṭutal*) and "killing" (*kollutal*). The scholar exhaustively proceeds in her analysis on the characters of such alchemical performances, additionally addressing the issue of non-human material agency connected to the frame of material ecocriticism.

Drawing on recent studies by Tiziana Pontillo on the traces of the *vrātya* culture in the *Mahābhārata*'s narratives on the two old-generation heroes, Bhīṣma and Droṇa, **Frank Köhler** in his article entitled, *Kṛpa: A Neglected Brahmin Warrior*, looks into the epic's textual material concerning another master of martial arts who fights on Duryodhana's side for wealth, namely Kṛpa, suggesting their affinity. For the sake of showing that the figure of Kṛpa should be perceived as one more embodiment of a culture in which social status is acquired as a result of competition and thus bound to warriorship, Köhler not only attempts to find various commonalities between the three, but also takes into account a narrative model proposed by Mangels (1994) to explain the narrative function of Kṛpa's character in the epics.

The paper, *Shattering the Crown of the God: Violence as a Formative and Legitimising Element in the Pāṇḍya Dynastic Narrative*, authored by **David Pierdominici Leão**, revolves around the motif of clash between a Pāṇḍya ruler and Indra in its various manifestations, as attested by the 5th-century Tamil *Cilapattikāram*, the 13th-century *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*, and the Sanskrit rendering of the latter, the 14th/15th-century *Hālāsyamāhātmya* as well as the late Paṇḍya copperplates issued during the Teṅkāśi dynastic period (14th–18th century CE). The author examines the motif as a political tool used by the dynasty in a gradual attempt to project their royal status onto the wider Sanskrit cosmopolis, and makes special reference to the aggressiveness of the legend of the king and Indra, and its implications for shaping the Pāṇḍya identity.

The two subsequent contributions are linked through emphasis placed on the artwork and its iconography in South Asia, specifically representations of the aggressive or fierce manifestations of the divinity.

Mythological narratives centred on violent motifs are the focus of **Cinzia Pieruccini**'s article, titled *Vīrabhadra, the Dreadful Destroyer of Sacrifices: Representations in Plaques from South India*. The paper, devoted to Vīrabhadra, one of the terrific aspects of Śiva, opens with a detailed analysis of the narratives about the god as expounded in several purāṇic sources (such as the *Śiva-*, *Liṅga-*, and *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa*s); as evidenced by Pieruccini, these textual testimonies describe

the god as an immense, fierce, and invicible being. The scholar then traces the development of the cult of Vīrabhadra in the South during the Vijayanagara era, and its dissemination by the influential Śaiva sect of the Vīraśaivas. The diffusion of the god's cult in the South is testified to by the increasing production of metal plaques depicting Vīrabhadra, such as those preserved in the Accademia Ambrosiana in Milan, which constitute the main focal point of Pieruccini's artistic analysis.

Another iconographic investigation is represented by the article of **Chiara Policardi**, titled *The Goddess on the Lion: Animal Symbolism in the Representations of the Female Warrior Deity in Kuṣāṇa and Early Gupta India*. This research paper is centred on the association between the warrior goddess and her *vāhana*, the lion, during the earliest centuries of CE. As in Policardi's contention, certain specific influence in the representation of the divine female figure—not directly identifiable with Durgā in any early Kuṣāṇa evidence—may be traced to the Hellenistic goddess Nanā, who had incorporated aspects of an even more ancient divinity, the Mesopotamic Inanna-Ištar, associated with the lion. The contribution suggestively focusses on the goddess' symbolical association with the feline through an analysis of early iconographic and textual testimonies, which, as evidenced by the author, may furnish insights into the representational development of this warrior deity, an early connection between developing Hinduism and local cults, and the interrelation between the representation of this gooddess and the Kuṣāṇa and early Gupta royal ideology.

A further region-based perspective connected to violent traits, but belonging to a completely different literary and preformatory realm, is represented by the research paper authored by **Chettiarthodi Rajendran** and titled *Celebrating Violence: Some Stage Practises in Kerala's Classical Theatre*. In his article, Rajendran focuses on the depiction and practical performance of violence and death in the extant tradition of the temple-theatre of Kerala, namely the Kūṭiyāṭṭam. He frames his exposition through a minute analysis of the debated issue concerning the representation of such cruel and violent aspects according to the Classical Indian theatrical tradition, represented by the rules of Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*. The paper focusses on several issues concerning the stage

depictions of horror-evoking scenes, including marginal detour into other classical performative traditions of Kerala such as Kathakaḷi. The author analyses theatrical performance through the lens of semiotics, placing emphasis on the practical aspects underlying stage performance such as costume, colour scheme, tonal features and acting modalities.

Yet another contribution, **Lidia Sudyka**'s *Landscape of the Battlefield: The Case of Varadāmbikāpariṇaya-Campū by Tirumalāmbā*, deals with the unique features of the depiction of the battlefield as found in the work of Tirumalāmbā, poetess at the court of Acyutadevarāya, king of the Tuluva dynasty of the Vijayanagara Empire in the first half of the 16th century. As Sudyka hypothesises, the scenes of the battle between Acyuta's father, Narasa Nāyaka, and the Chola king described by Tirumalāmbā in her *campū* are most likely another deliberate element aimed at advancing imperial politics and legitimising Acyuta's power, activities in which she was involved through her compositions. As a poetess probably could not have witnessed the battle, so she resorts to poetic tropes and stylistic devices most familiar to her. Sudyka shows, however, that in addition to the conventional images used by Tirumalāmbā to convey the atmosphere of the battlefield, the bloodiness of some of them is remarkable due to the juxtaposition of images, associated with peaceful family life and courtly scenes, with vignettes evoking exceptional cruelty.

The subject of **Aleksandra Turek**'s article titled, *Rajput Vocabulary of Violence*, is an analysis of selected terms found in Rajput-related textual sources, like those composed in the literary style of the Marwari language, commonly known as Dingal. As pointed out by the author, unpacking the less obvious meaning of keywords such as *vair*, *bāroṭiyā*, *dacoity* and *bhomiyāvat* is essential for identifying and understanding various cultural patterns of collective violence associated with the Rajputs, both on and off the battlefield, cultural patterns which often differ from the stereotypical perceptions produced and disseminated during the colonial era.

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Adding Insult to Injury
Whipping Stories from the *Mahābhārata*

ABSTRACT: In the *Mahābhārata* (MBh), whipping is mainly resorted to by charioteers while driving their horses and the terms designating whips are therefore frequently found in the war-books. Used metaphorically, the expression "whip-like words" designates cutting, hurtful speech. Excessive whipping of draught-animals is considered cruel and is seen as a sign of low birth. When humans are whipped, this is regarded as particularly insulting, since such treatment is usually reserved for animals, but the outcome for the offenders is unequal: kings who whip brahmins are swiftly punished and cursed, whereas brahmins who flog kings get away with it scot-free. Such tales are most frequently found in the MBh's *Anuśāsanaparvan*, where they serve to underscore the brahmins' superiority.

KEYWORDS: *Mahābhārata*, whipping, cruelty, domestic animals, brahmins versus *kṣatriya*s

Introduction

When I was kindly invited to contribute to this volume on "Shades of Violence: Aggression and Domination in Indian Culture," I decided to examine the ways in which humans exert their domination over

domestic animals[1] in the great Sanskrit epic, the *Mahābhārata* (MBh).[2] My attention was drawn to a few realistically depicted scenes where draught-animals are cruelly whipped, so I decided to restrict my investigation to the topic of whipping. Unexpectedly, far from limiting the scope of this study, whipping took me further afield than I expected. As it turned out, not only animals are yoked and beaten, but the same happens to human beings as well. Being whipped like a draught-animal is of course singularly humiliating, hence the title of this article: "Adding insult to injury." The MBh presents us with stories in which either brahmins are beaten by kings—who are then swiftly cursed for their insolence; or *kṣatriya*s are yoked and whipped by brahmins—who get away with it. Using the whip on other human beings to degrade and dehumanize them shows the extent to which some kings, but especially the brahmins, were prepared to go to demonstrate their superiority. Such scenes illustrate very graphically the ever-on-going rivalry between the two highest classes. The topic of whipping thus rises above the mere anecdotal and becomes a part and parcel of the epic's grander scheme to underscore the brahmins' might.

Unlike what was—and unfortunately sometimes still is—practiced in many other cultures, in ancient India flogging does not appear to have been a common punishment for human beings, be they slaves, criminals or sinners. Although this text does not shy away from other types of corporeal punishment, the *Manusmṛti*[3] prescribes whipping only in a single instance:

> A virgin who pollutes (another) virgin must be fined two hundred (*paṇa*s), pay the double of her bride-price, and receive ten whip-lashes. (*Manusmṛti* 8.369)[4]

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1 The topic of animals in India is thoroughly investigated in a collection of articles edited by Balbir and Pinault (2009), but none of these focus on the Sanskrit epics.

2 References will be given throughout to the critical edition of this text (Sukthankar et al. 1933–1966). Unless otherwise mentioned, the translations are my own.

3 Translations are by Doniger and Smith 1991.

4 *kanyaiva kanyāṃ yā kuryāt tasyāḥ syād dviśato damaḥ |*
śulkaṃ ca dviguṇaṃ dadyāc chiphāś caivāpnuyād daśa || *Manusmṛti* 8.369 ||

Instances from other law-books are even more difficult to find. The *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* does not prescribe actual whipping, but "beating with a stick" (*daṇḍa-tāḍanam*) in few instances involving transgressions perpetrated by *śūdra*s, farmhands or herdsmen (e.g., 2.27.15; 2.28.2–3). In 12.7, the *Gautama Dharmasūtra* uses the verbal adjective *daṇḍya* (lit. "to be beaten with a stick") for similar offences.[5] From this meagre evidence, we can conclude that whipping or beating was not only very rarely prescribed as a punishment for human beings but was also restricted to men from the lower classes and to sexually misbehaving women. In general, outside the context of penal rules, the Law books speak firmly against physical violence—except in the case of pupils and sons, who may be beaten for the sake of instruction (!) (See *Manusmṛti* 4.164).

Literal and metaphorical whipping in the great epic

Let us now turn to the evidence found in the MBh, starting with a few preliminary remarks concerning the terminology: the two terms most frequently used to designate whips in the great epic are *kaśā*, f. "whip, rein, whipping, rope" and *pratoda*, m. (from the root *pra-tud-* "to strike forward"): "goad or long whip."[6] Even though they serve the same purpose, whips and goads have of course quite different shapes: a whip designates a rope-like instrument with a handle, and a goad is basically a sharp-pointed stick. But in Sanskrit the two terms *kaśā* and *pratoda* semantically overlap. In the case of *pratoda*, especially when used alone, it is not always quite clear which instrument is meant, although sometimes the context allows us to decide.

Stories in which whipping is the central motif are not very frequent in the MBh. Mostly, whips or goads are referred to rather

The term *śiphā*, f. designates "a fibrous and flexible root (used for making whips, etc.); a lash or stroke with a whip or rod". (Cf. Monier-Williams dictionary, with reference to this verse for the second meaning.)

5 Ed. Olivelle 2000.

6 Cf. Monier-Williams dictionary.

matter-of-factly and without negative connotation in the case of charioteers driving their horses or other draught-animals, to instigate these animals to greater speed. These terms naturally occur most frequently in the war-books, where the great warriors fight from their chariots. For instance, while fleeing, the Kauravas speed up their horses using whips, goads, and loud shouts:

> Your soldiers fled quickly, instigating their horses with goads, the tips of their bows, the cries of "hum" correctly conveyed, by striking them on their backs with whips, and by means of loud shouts. (MBh 7.64.58–59b)[7]

Breaking the charioteers' whips by targeting them with arrows is a favorite tactic of war, effectively hindering charioteers from driving their horses efficiently. This happens quite often to Kṛṣṇa, who has chosen not to fight in the great war but to serve as Arjuna's charioteer:

> He (Duryodhana) hit Vāsudeva in the center of his chest with ten (arrows), and, after breaking his whip with an arrow, he made it fall on the ground. (MBh 7.78.2)[8]

Or,

> But Bhūriśravas, enraged, broke Hari's whip, and hit Arjuna with seventy-three arrows. (MBh 7.79.32)[9]

Accordingly, both *pratoda*s and *kaśā*s are often found strewn on the ground with other war paraphernalia when the battle is over:

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7 *pratodaiś cāpakoṭībhir huṃkāraiḥ sādhuvāhitaiḥ* |
kaśāpārṣṇyabhighātaiś ca vāgbhir ugrābhir eva ca ||
codayanto hayāṃs tūrṇaṃ palāyante sma tāvakāḥ || MBh 7.64.58–59b ||

8 *vāsudevaṃ ca daśabhiḥ pratyavidhyat stanāntare* |
pratodaṃ cāsya bhallena chittvā bhūmāv apātayat || MBh 7.78.2 ||

9 *bhūriśravās tu saṃkruddhaḥ pratodaṃ cicchide hareḥ* |
arjunaṃ ca trisaptatyā bāṇānām ājaghāna ha || MBh 7.79.32 ||

> And here, heaps of goads, whips, as well as thongs are found strewn on the battleground, O Māriṣa! (MBh 6.51.32)[10]

Whips may occasionally serve as weapons as well. Thus, when Arjuna displays prolonged reluctance to slay Bhīṣma, Kṛṣṇa impatiently rushes from his chariot, whip in hand, to finish him off himself. Arjuna restrains him in the nick of time. Evocative of Doomsday and reminiscent of certain *Bhagavadgītā*[11] passages, the impressive extended comparison between the Great Lord and a lion pouncing on its prey makes the whip in his hand seem like deadly claws:

> Holding his whip in his hand, powerful, repeatedly roaring like a lion, the lord of the earth seemed to tear the earth asunder with his feet; his eyes reddened by rage, of immeasurable splendour, Kṛṣṇa, intent on his kill, devoured, so to say, your soldiers' minds in the great battle. (MBh 6.102.54–55)[12]

There are quite a few passages in the great epic where whips and whipping are used as a figure of speech: in metaphorical language, the *karmadhāraya* compound *vāk-pratoda*, "whip-like words" (literally, "the whip [which consists of] speech") is frequently used to denote deeply hurtful, cutting language. The image is of course particularly expressive and readily understandable: just as a whip physically cuts to the quick and prompts the whipped animal to speedy movement, so the cutting words psychologically wound the person to whom they are addressed and instigate him or her to take speedy action. This happens for instance after the war, when Yudhiṣṭhira exhorts Duryodhana to come out of a lake in which he is hiding and fight:

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10 *pratodānāṃ kaśānāṃ ca yoktrāṇāṃ caiva māriṣa* |
rāśayaś cātra dṛśyante vinikīrṇā raṇakṣitau || MBh 6.51.32 ||

11 See esp. *Bhagavadgītā* 11.26–29 (= MBh 6.33.26–29).

12 *pratodapāṇis tejasvī siṃhavad vinadan muhuḥ* |
dārayann iva padbhyāṃ sa jagatīṃ jagatīśvaraḥ ||
krodhatāmrekṣaṇaḥ kṛṣṇo jighāṃsur amitadyutiḥ ||
grasann iva ca cetāṃsi tāvakānāṃ mahāhave || MBh 6.102.54–55 ||

> Then the intelligent (Duryodhana), being struck repeatedly by (Yudhiṣṭhira's) goad-like words, could not stand this speech, as an excellent horse (cannot suffer) the whip. (MBh 9.31.34)[13]

Unable to bear his enemy's taunts, the proud Duryodhana finally comes out of the water and agrees to fight his last battle.

In MBh 5.165, Bhīṣma explains to Duryodhana the relative worth and valour of their various allies, measured in terms of *ratha* ("chariot," i.e., a warrior who fights alone on a chariot), or *ati-ratha* (lit. "super-chariot" or great hero), or *ardha-ratha* ("half-chariot," i.e., one who shares his chariot with another warrior). Bhīṣma says that Karṇa, who has lost his divine armour and earrings and incurred the brahmin Rāma Jāmadagnya's curse, is merely an *ardha-ratha*, which is of course singularly insulting for the great hero (MBh 5.165.6). Karṇa (here called Rādheya, "son of Rādhā," by the name of his adoptive mother), who has been listening to their discussion, reacts with fury:

> When Rādheya heard this, his eyes popped in anger, and he said to Bhīṣma, great king, lashing him with whiplike words, "Grandfather […] you cut me angrily down with words like arrows at your whim…" (MBh 5.165.9–10a; transl. by van Buitenen 1978)[14]

Karṇa's words are whips, whereas Bhīṣma's are arrows: these two different metaphors subtly underscore the difference in rank between Karṇa, the adoptive son of a whip-wielding charioteer, and Bhīṣma, the super-*kṣatriya* who of course fights using a bow and arrows.[15]

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13 *tathāsau vākpratodena tudyamānaḥ punaḥ punaḥ* |
vācaṃ na mamṛṣe dhīmān uttamāśvaḥ kaśām iva || MBh 9.31.34 ||

14 *etac chrutvā tu rādheyaḥ krodhād utphullalocanaḥ* |
uvāca bhīṣmaṃ rājendra tudan vāgbhiḥ pratodavat ||
pitāmaha yatheṣṭaṃ māṃ vākśarair upakṛntasi || MBh 5.165.9–10a ||

15 This distribution of "weapons", in this case between the higher *kṣatriya* and the lower *vaiśya* class, is also found in *Manusmṛti* 3.44, in the context of rules concerning marriage: "When a woman marries a man of superior class, a woman of the ruler class (*kṣatriyā*) must take hold of an arrow (*śara*), a commoner (*vaiśya*) girl of a whip (*pratoda*)".

The unbreachable gulf between *kṣatriya* and *sūta* is already very cruelly demonstrated earlier on in the verbal exchange that takes place between Karṇa and Bhīma at their very first meeting. Bhīma mockingly sends Karṇa back to his whip, when he sees that the latter is preparing to fight a duel against Arjuna:

> "Son of a *sūta*," [Bhīma] said, "you do not have the right to die in a fight with a Pārtha! You better stick to the whip that suits your family. You have no right to enjoy the Aṅga kingdom, churl, no more than a dog has a right to eat the cake by the fire at a sacrifice!" At these words a slight tremor started in Karṇa's lower lip, and he sighed and looked up to the sun in the sky. (MBh 1.127.6–8; transl. by van Buitenen 1973)[16]

Bhīma is of course unaware that Karṇa is his elder brother: they share the same mother Kuntī-Pṛthā, which makes Karṇa by rights a Pārtha too. Karṇa's father is Sūrya the sun-God, which explains why Karṇa looks up to the sun as if to call upon him to witness the ignominy he is submitted to. We see that Bhīma uses extremely offensive and hurtful language towards Karṇa, telling him that he is not even worthy to die at Arjuna's hands, completely ruling out the possibility that Karṇa might win the fight; then comparing him to a dog unworthy of eating the sacrificial oblation and driving Karṇa to the verge of tears—as his sighs and his trembling lower lip betray. But more to the point for our present discussion, we see that Bhīma is in effect advising Karṇa to stick to his whip instead of fighting with nobler weapons. The whip is here described as *kulasya sadṛśas*, "suitable to your family." The *sūta*s or charioteers—said to be born of a forbidden (or *pratiloma*) union between a brahmin woman and a *kṣatriya* father (cf. *Manusmṛti* 10.11)—belong of course to an inferior caste, one deemed, at

[16] *na tvam arhasi pārthena sūtaputra raṇe vadham |*
kulasya sadṛśas tūrṇaṃ pratodo gṛhyatāṃ tvayā ||
aṅgarājyaṃ ca nārhas tvam upabhoktuṃ narādhama |
śvā hutāśasamīpasthaṃ puroḍāśam ivādhvare ||
evam uktas tataḥ karṇaḥ kiṃ cit prasphuritādharaḥ |
gaganasthaṃ viniḥśvasya divākaram udaikṣata || MBh 1.127.6–8 ||

least by Bhīma, to be unworthy of fighting a *kṣatriya*. Thus, wielding a whip is seen here as the sign of a low birth, of someone whose job requires him to deal with animals.

Indra, Surabhi and the whipped bullock (MBh 3.10)

In all the above non-metaphorical references to whipping, no special cruelty seems to be attached to the deed: charioteers whip their horses to make them move faster, without intent to inflict serious harm. They use their whips routinely as instruments of their trade. But two stories found in the great epic stand out in this regard: in these, whipping is exerted against helpless animals in an exceedingly cruel, even sadistic way. In both cases, the whipper is a low-caste man, and his behaviour is condemned as heart-rending, fierce, and even as symptomatic of his low station in life. The first such story is found in MBh 3.10, where it is told by the sage Vyāsa to his son, King Dhṛtarāṣṭra, when the latter piteously confesses that he cannot help but love and support his own son, Duryodhana, even though he is quite aware of his evil nature. Vyāsa shows sympathy and agrees that love for one's children is indeed one of the most powerful emotions in the world. He tells Dhṛtarāṣṭra the following story to illustrate his point.

Once upon a time, he says, the divine Surabhi, mother of all cows, went crying to the god Indra because one of her sons (a bullock) was being tortured at the plough and struck with a whip or goad (*pratoda*), although he was already excessively feeble and exhausted. Surabhi tells Indra:

> Look at that dreadful peasant beating up with his goad that weak little son of mine who smarts under the plough! When I see one already so exhausted being beaten, I am seized with compassion, overlord of Gods, and my heart is aroused. There is the strong one who carries a heavier yoke, and there is the other of little strength and vigor, emaciated, held together by his veins. He is beaten with the goad and prodded again and again, but he can hardly pull the load; look at it, Vāsava! That is why I grievously and

sorrowfully cry out and from compassion shed these tears from my eyes. (MBh 3.10.10–14; transl. by van Buitenen 1975)[17]

Indra is highly astonished that she should feel such pain for just one of her sons, when she has thousands of them. But Surabhi replies that she feels the greatest compassion for the weakest among them. Indra then rains a torrential shower, forcing the farmer to stop his work, thereby bringing temporary relief to the feeble bullock.[18]

It is interesting to note that the same tale, with minor differences and quite similar wording, occurs in *Rāmāyaṇa* (Rm) 2.68.15–25:[19] incensed at his mother Kaikeyī's scheming to send Rāma into exile, Bharata tells her this story as an example of how even a mother of thousands—Surabhi—suffers when but two of her sons are treated with cruelty.[20] How much greater, then, must be Kausalyā's suffering, who is now deprived of her only son, Rāma? Both versions of the story are quite similar in content and intent—showing how strong parental love can be. The only significant difference is that the Rm's version does not tell us if Indra does anything to alleviate the poor bullocks' suffering.

The word used in both versions of the story for the "fierce" farmer who is ploughing his field is *karṣaka*, from the root *kṛṣ*- "to draw or

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17 *paśyainaṃ karṣakaṃ raudraṃ durbalaṃ mama putrakam* |
pratodenābhinighnantaṃ lāṅgalena nipīḍitam ||
etaṃ dṛṣṭvā bhṛśaṃ śrāntaṃ vadhyamānaṃ surādhipa |
kṛpāviṣṭāsmi devendra manaś codvijate mama ||
ekas tatra balopeto dhuram udvahate 'dhikām |
aparo 'lpabalaprāṇaḥ kṛśo dhamanisaṃtataḥ |
kṛcchrād udvahate bhāraṃ taṃ vai śocāmi vāsava ||
vadhyamānaḥ pratodena tudyamānaḥ punaḥ punaḥ |
naiva śaknoti taṃ bhāram udvoḍhuṃ paśya vāsava ||
tato 'haṃ tasya duḥkhārtā viraumi bhṛśaduḥkhitā |
aśrūṇy āvartayantī ca netrābhyāṃ karuṇāyatī || MBh 3.10.10–14 ||

18 One may of course wonder why Indra does not resort to a more radical solution to relieve the poor beast. As in other places in the epics, Indra seems to be losing his power as the war-like king of the gods and appears as a "mere" god of rain.

19 References are given to the Critical Edition of the text (Bhatt 1960–1975).

20 Here both bullocks who pull the plough are weak and cruelly beaten.

make furrows, plough; to cause pain, torture, torment."[21] *karṣaka*, "husbandman," accordingly means both "ploughing" and "tormenting." Indeed, the act of ploughing entails torturing the earth, the animals who live in it, and even those who pull the plough, as we see from this tale which can be read as a manifesto for humane treatment of draught animals.[22] This vignette, which allows us a glimpse into Indian rural life, should be seen in the context of increasing glorification and protection of cows—extended here to the cows' male offspring.[23]

In this story, the pathos is greatly enhanced because the whole piteous description of the bullock's suffering is given in the voice coming from the mouth of the holy Surabhi. Surabhi, the "sweet-smelling," is a goddess, the daughter of Dakṣa (sometimes of Brahmā) and one of the many wives of the demiurge Kaśyapa. She is said to be the mother of all cows (see MBh 1.6.65 and 1.93.8–9; Rm 3.13.27). As in this narrative, her physical appearance is not always clearly described. Sometimes, she is undoubtedly imagined as a woman,[24] but mostly she is represented as a cow.[25] Since Vedic times, cows have been renowned for their affection towards their offspring, so much so that the term *vatsa*, "calf," has become fixed as a term of endearment.[26]

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[21] See Monier-Williams dictionary. The term occurs in Rm 2.68.22.

[22] Balbir (2009: 813) quotes equally pathetic scenes from Jain texts, especially from the *Kuvalayamālā*, explaining that "le bovin, compagnon quotidien et privilégié du villageois dans ses tâches, est, de ce fait, celui dont les souffrances sont le plus souvent évoquées."

[23] This motif occurs more frequently in the MBh's 13th book, which contains several stories meant to extol and sanctify the cows. See MBh 13.51; 13.69–70; 13.75–82.

[24] For instance, in MBh 13.82.26–29, Surabhi is said to perform a severe penance "standing on one foot" (*vyatiṣṭhad ekapādena*, MBh 13.82.28), surely an impossible position for a quadruped!

[25] See MBh 13.128.10ab, which states that "Brahmā emitted Surabhi, the milk-yielding ambrosia cow" (*surabhīṃ sasṛje brahmāmṛtadhenuṃ payomucam*). MBh 13.151.7 mentions "the goddess Surabhi, the somic cow" (*saumyā gauḥ surabhir devī*). Surabhi is said to be made of *soma* or *amṛta*, because, according to these passages, Brahmā vomited after consuming a surfeit of *amṛta*, and the cow was born of it. The cows' milk is thus like ambrosia.

[26] The derived term *vātsalya*, "affection (towards offspring)" subsequently gave its name to the *vātsalya-rasa*, the flavour of parental love or tenderness. This *rasa*

This poignant story, showing to what great lengths Surabhi, as the mother of all bovines, is prepared to go to protect her young immediately resonates with other stories told in both epics, demonstrating how cows suffer when harm is done to their offspring. In these tales, kings forcefully grab the calves of cows belonging to certain great sages. This motif appears prominently in the story of the brahmin sage Jamadagni and King Arjuna Kārttavīrya (MBh 3.116.20–3.117.9; 12.48–49), and in the story of sage Vasiṣṭha and King Viśvāmitra (MBh 1.164–165).[27] In MBh 3.116.21 and MBh 12.49.40 ff., King Arjuna Kārttavīrya or his sons carry away the calf of Jamadagni's cow. When the sage's son, Rāma Jāmadagnya, comes home and sees the crying cow, he fetches back her bellowing calf after cutting off King Arjuna's one thousand arms. The king's evil sons retaliate by murdering the sage Jamadagni. To avenge his father's death, Rāma then slaughters the entire *kṣatriya* race twenty-one times in a row. In MBh 1.164–165, Vasiṣṭha's wish-fulfilling cow provokes King Viśvāmitra's greed. When Vasiṣṭha refuses to give her to him, he seizes her calf. The cow gets enraged when she sees that the king's soldiers have fettered her calf and are taking it away by force (MBh 1.165.30). She then creates, out of the orifices of her body, whole armies which exterminate Viśvāmitra's forces and his sons.

As we see, such attempts on the part of kings to take by force the brahmins' cows and calves always initiate serious hostilities between brahmins and *kṣatriya*s, and usually result in great bloodshed. While the topic of the animosity and rivalry between *kṣatriya*s and brahmins is of course not directly evoked in the story of Surabhi and her weak bullock-son—who is tormented by a farmer and not by a king—it cannot fail to occur to the minds of the readers or listeners of this tale who are aware of the larger epic context. It also announces,

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came into existence only in the post-Abhinavagupta times. It is notably prominent in the writings of the Vaiṣṇava thinker Rūpa Gosvāmin, where it forms the fourth level (out of five) of the *bhakti-rasa*. See David Buchta (*Rasa Theory*, https://www.academia.edu/1648222/Rasa_Theory; pp. 627–628).

[27] Both stories also occur elsewhere, but sometimes in an abridged form, and they do not always mention the cows' calves.

in a way, some of the other stories which will be dealt with later in this study, and in which the struggle between the two highest social classes is the central theme.

Mataṅga and the donkeys (MBh 13.28–30)

The second story in which excessive and cruel whipping is inflicted on a domestic animal is found in MBh 13.28–30. The 13th book of the great epic, the *Anuśāsanaparvan* or the "book of teachings," continues Bhīṣma's advice to Yudhiṣṭhira after the war. Here Bhīṣma expounds on the greatness of brahmins and illustrates the difficulty, indeed impossibility, of becoming a brahmin if one has not been born one. The story is as follows:

A young man called Mataṅga, officially a brahmin's son, is sent by his father to fetch sacrificial implements. He sets off on a cart drawn by a young donkey who strays off the road to join his mother's side. Mataṅga gets enraged beyond measure:

> With his whip,[28] (Mataṅga) again and again slashed the young donkey on the nose, because he was going off to his mother's side. The mother donkey, full of affection for her son and seeing him cruelly wounded, said: "Do not grieve, my son, the one who is driving you is an untouchable. There is no cruelty in a brahmin, a brahmin is said to be benevolent. He is the teacher and instructor of all beings, why would he hurt (anyone)? But this evil-natured one has no pity (even) on the young. He is paying tribute to his own birth. Birds of a feather flock together!" (MBh 13.28.9–12)[29]

[28] Here we can confidently translate *pratoda* as "whip" since a goad could probably not reach the donkey's nose.

[29] *sa bālaṃ gardabhaṃ rājan vahantaṃ mātur antike |*
niravidhyat pratodena nāsikāyāṃ punaḥ punaḥ ||
taṃ tu tīvravraṇaṃ dṛṣṭvā gardabhī putragṛddhinī |
uvāca mā śucaḥ putra caṇḍālas tvādhitiṣṭhati ||
brāhmaṇe dāruṇaṃ nāsti maitro brāhmaṇa ucyate |
ācāryaḥ sarvabhūtānāṃ śāstā kiṃ prahariṣyati ||

Mataṅga is naturally upset when he hears the donkey-mother's words and asks her what she means by it. She explains that he is really a barber's son, and not the son of a brahmin:

> You were born an untouchable (sired) by a low barber in a lustful brahmin woman; that is why your brahmin-hood was destroyed. (MBh 13.28.16)[30]

The context does not explain how this female donkey can speak and communicate with a human, nor how she came by such knowledge. But what she says is certainly in accordance with the *Dharmaśāstra*s. For according to the texts of Law, the son of a brahmin woman and of a *śūdra* man—the offspring of the lowest *pratiloma* (against the grain) type of union—is indeed said to be an untouchable (see *Manusmṛti* 10.12). Devastated at the news, Mataṅga starts a terrible penance which lasts for hundreds of years. He repeatedly asks Indra to make him a brahmin, but Indra always replies that this is impossible. When he is about to breathe his last, Mataṅga finally changes his wish and is made into a divine being. As we see, the point of the story is that it is easier to become a god than a brahmin.

Several indices in this tale alert us to the fact that Mataṅga cannot possibly be a brahmin. The first is his name, *mataṃ-ga*, "going wilfully" or "roaming at will," "an elephant,"[31] which already points to an "unbrahmanical" lack of restraint. According to a (1st century?) Buddhist text, the *Mataṅgasūtra* (also called *Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna*), the Mātaṅgas, or descendants of Mataṅga, are precisely a clan of *caṇḍāla*s.[32] In the later tantric literature, the name Mātaṅgī is given to an outcaste goddess who "is associated with pollution and leftovers

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ayaṃ tu pāpaprakṛtir bāle na kurute dayām |
svayoniṃ mānayaty eṣa bhāvo bhāvaṃ nigacchati || MBh 13.28.9–12 ||

30 *brāhmaṇyāṃ vṛṣalena tvaṃ mattāyāṃ nāpitena ha* |
jātas tvam asi caṇḍālo brāhmaṇyaṃ tena te 'naśat || MBh 13.28.16 ||

31 See Monier-Williams dictionary.

32 See Kotyk 1995. In Bāṇa's *Kādambarī*, the chief of the Śabaras (tribal hunters) who kill the young parrot's father is also called Mātaṅgaka.

(stale food). In the 15th-century *Caṇḍīpurāṇa* of Saralādāsa, Mātaṅgī has the donkey as her *vāhana*," as Ferrari (2015: 68–69) informs us.[33]

The second indication of Mataṅga's unbrahmanical nature is precisely his association with donkeys: these were despised animals in ancient India, considered inauspicious, lustful, and impure.[34] Their discordant braying was considered a sign of ill-omen, like the jackal's howls, and they were associated with death, especially in premonitory dreams.[35] The belief in their supposedly lustful nature probably originates from the size of the male donkeys' genital organs, and from the fact that they can impregnate both mares and jennies. Asses were therefore considered to be super-virile animals.[36] The purportedly lecherous nature of these animals explains why donkeys were frequently used as a means of punishment for sexual offenses. For instance, lesbian or adulterous women were shaved and paraded naked on a donkey (cf. *Manusmṛti* 8.370; *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* 21.1–4).[37] If a brahmanical student shed his semen, he had to "put on the skin of a donkey and go begging from seven houses, proclaiming his own act" (*Manusmṛti* 11.123).[38] Asses were also closely associated with untouchables. As Manu 10.52 declares: "dogs and donkeys should be their wealth" (*dhanam eṣāṃ śvagardabham*). This connection makes them highly polluting and explains why brahmins were not supposed to drive on a cart drawn by asses. If they did, they had to expiate the deed, as stated in *Manusmṛti* 11.203: "If a priest intentionally rides in a carriage drawn by camels or by donkeys, […] he is

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33 As Ferrari (2014: 67–70) remarks, many inauspicious goddesses ride an ass or are associated with this animal from Vedic times onwards.

34 About asses in ancient India, see Ferrari 2014: 67 ff., and Taylor 2007: 70–74.

35 See for instance Rm 2.63.14 and 5.25.18–19.

36 See Ferrari 2015: 72: "In the *Maitrāyaṇīsaṃhitā* (3.1.6: 7, 16) 'the ass is the most virile animal of all' […] 'whilst being one, doubly impregnates' (i.e., the mare and the jenny) (ŚB 6.3.1: 22–23; cf. AB 4.9)".

37 This practice survives up to modern times, as revealed in the Dalit writer Kausalya Baisantri's Hindi autobiography: *Dohrā abhiśāp* [The Double Curse]. Delhi: Kitabghar Prakaśan, 1999. See Browarczyk 2013: 300.

38 *etasminn enasi prāpte vasitvā gardabhājinam* |
saptāgārāṃś cared bhaikṣaṃ svakarma parikīrtayan || *Manusmṛti* 11.123 ||

cleaned by suppressing his breath."[39] The above considerations show that Mataṅga's connection with donkeys makes his brahminhood improbable from the start.

The last indicator of Mataṅga's low birth, as explained by the donkey-mother, is supposedly his cruelty itself. Again, her statement finds corroboration from Manu, whose description closely tallies our story:

> An unknown man, of no (visible) class but born of a defiled womb and no Aryan, may seem to have the form of an Aryan, but he can be discovered by his own innate activities. Un-Aryan behaviour, harshness, cruelty, and habitual failure to perform the rituals are the manifestations in this world indicating that a man is born of a defiled womb. (*Manusṛmrti* 10.57–58)[40]

As the mother donkey tells her son, Mataṅga cannot possibly be a brahmin, since brahmins are gentle by nature and would never whip a young one so cruelly on the nose, an especially sensitive spot. We may of course wonder if it is a real consolation for the young donkey to learn that his tormentor is not a twice born, but the crucial point made here by this story is that cruelty—even against a supposedly impure and inauspicious donkey—is frowned upon as a sign of low birth, whereas gentleness is said to be the mark of a brahmin. This is a point we shall have occasion to qualify below.

Śakti and Kalmāṣapāda (MBh 1.166)

As we have seen, whipping is an infrequent punishment, even for criminals or sinners. In all the passages we have examined so far, whipping

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[39] *uṣṭrayānaṃ samāruhya kharayānaṃ tu kāmataḥ* |
[…] *vipro* […] *prāṇāyāmena śudhyati* || *Manusmṛti* 11.203 ||

[40] *varṇāpetam avijñātaṃ naraṃ kaluṣayonijam* |
āryarūpam ivānāryaṃ karmabhiḥ svair vibhāvayet ||
anāryatā niṣṭhuratā krūratā niṣkriyātmatā |
puruṣaṃ vyañjayantīha loke kaluṣayonijam || *Manusmṛti* 10.57–58 ||

is always inflicted on animals, not on humans. Yet there are a few tales in the great epic where human beings are being whipped. One such story occurs in MBh 1.166.[41] One day, Kalmāṣapāda, king of Ayodhyā, went on a hunting expedition in the forest. Hungry and thirsty from the hunt, he suddenly found his narrow path blocked by the brahmin Śakti, the eldest son of the great sage Vasiṣṭha. The king addressed Śakti rudely:

> "Get off the path, it is ours!" said the king who was undefeated in battle. Attempting to soothe him, the seer spoke to him in a kindly voice, but he did not give way as he walked the path of the Law. Nor did the king give way, out of pique and anger with the hermit; and when the seer refused to clear the path, that great king in his folly hit the hermit with his whip like a Rākṣasa. Stung by the whip lash, the excellent hermit, Vasiṣṭha's son, was enraged and cursed the good king: "Since you strike an ascetic like a Rākṣasa, you shall from this day be a man-eater, degenerate king! You will roam this earth and feed on human flesh. Now avaunt, worst of kings!" Thus he was cursed by Śakti, whose power was his prowess. (MBh 1.166.5–10; transl. by van Buitenen 1973)[42]

According to the Law books, in such circumstances, the brahmin has the right of way. As Manu states in 2.138–139, if a king and a Vedic graduate (*snātaka*) meet, right of way must be given (*panthā deyo*)

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[41] For this story, see Feller 2023: 296 ff.

[42] *apagaccha patho 'smākam ity evaṃ pārthivo 'bravīt* |
ṛṣis tu nāpacakrāma tasmin dharmapathe sthitaḥ |
nāpi rājā muner mānāt krodhāc cāpi jagāma ha ||
amuñcantaṃ tu panthānaṃ tam ṛṣiṃ nṛpasattamaḥ |
jaghāna kaśayā mohāt tadā rākṣasavan munim ||
kaśāprahārābhihatas tataḥ sa munisattamaḥ |
taṃ śaśāpa nṛpaśreṣṭhaṃ vāsiṣṭhaḥ krodhamūrcchitaḥ ||
haṃsi rākṣasavad yasmād rājāpasada tāpasam |
tasmāt tvam adya prabhṛti puruṣādo bhaviṣyasi ||
manuṣyapiśite saktaś cariṣyasi mahīm imām |
gaccha rājādhamety uktaḥ śaktinā vīryaśaktinā || MBh 1.166.5–10 ||

to the *snātaka*.[43] Śakti is therefore in his right. Nevertheless, he first speaks soothing words and only retaliates when the king lashes out at him with his whip. This passage highlights the motif of the brahmins' gentleness and forbearance, as opposed to the king's irascibility and impatience. Śakti's defense takes the form of a curse commensurate with the offense: since the king behaves like a Rākṣasa, he is turned into an actual Rākṣasa. Kalmāṣapāda's outrageous behaviour is at least partly explained by his hunger and fatigue from the hunt, which allow him to be overcome by anger (*krodha*), pride (*māna*) and mental confusion (*moha*). These—brought about by hunting, a frowned-upon addiction—are the cardinal passions that a king must be beware of.

This single whip lash administered by the misguided king to the brahmin Śakti unleashed a singularly devastating string of consequences: the king, first cursed by Śakti to turn into a Rākṣasa, saw this curse subsequently compounded by another brahmin's curse, to whom he had fed human flesh unwittingly (MBh 1.166.31–32). Under the sway of these two curses, Kalmāṣapāda, craving human flesh, first devoured Śakti himself,[44] soon followed by his ninety-nine younger brothers. The sage Vasiṣṭha's biological lineage—and, perhaps even more importantly, his Vedic line[45]—was thus threatened with extinction. Fortunately, Śakti's wife happened to be pregnant at the time of her husband's death and managed to protect her unborn child from Kalmāṣapāda, thus ensuring the continuation of Vasiṣṭha's descendance and of his Vedic tradition. King Kalmāṣapāda was delivered from his curse twelve years later by Vasiṣṭha, who forgave him his crimes. But the king could have no progeny, for during his years as a Rākṣasa, a brahmin woman had cursed him to die if he

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[43] By *snātaka*, we may probably understand any brahmin who has completed his Vedic studies.

[44] This is a rare instance when a brahmin's curse backfires on its author.

[45] Vasiṣṭha is of course a *ṛṣi* or Vedic seer. He is the renowned author of several Ṛgvedic hymns, especially of the whole 7th *maṇḍala*. If his family's lineage were to disappear, it is likely that the memory (and transmission) of these hymns would fade as well. See Feller 2023: 301, ff.

ever again lay with his wife (MBh 1.173).[46] Therefore, Kalmāṣapāda begged Vasiṣṭha to beget a child on his wife. Vasiṣṭha agreed, thus saving the king's lineage. However, the story does not end there: after Śakti's son, Parāśara, was born, he learned what had happened to his father and decided to take revenge by performing a Rākṣasa-sacrifice.[47] Nearly all the Rākṣasas were exterminated, but fortunately, the assembled sages intervened and put a stop to the massacre of innocent Rākṣasas (MBh 1.172.11). As we see, in a single stroke—quite literally speaking—king Kalmāṣapāda nearly wiped out three lineages: Vasiṣṭha's, the Rākṣasas' and his own.

Agastya and Nahuṣa (MBh 13.102–103)

Another story where a king whips a brahmin is found in MBh 13.102–103. Bhīṣma tells Yudhiṣṭhira the story of king Nahuṣa and the sage Agastya. This tale is mentioned not less than three times in the great epic, in more or less developed forms.[48] The virtuous King Nahuṣa, Bhīṣma says, was appointed to be the new Indra, because the "real" Indra had left his position and gone into hiding. Nahuṣa was first a just ruler, but by and by he became puffed up with pride due to his lofty

[46] The brahmin woman gave this curse to Kalmāṣapāda because, coming upon the couple as they were making love in the forest, he had ruthlessly devoured her husband despite her anguished entreaties.

[47] Parāśara's rather faulty logic seems to be that since the king had carried out his gory murders in the shape of a Rākṣasa, all the Rākṣasas as a class should be held responsible.

[48] See also MBh 3.176, where Nahuṣa (in the form of a huge snake) tells Bhīma and Yudhiṣṭhira that he fell from heaven due to Agastya's curse (3.176.14), without entering into details as to how it happened; in MBh 5.9–17, the story is told more extensively and also explains why there was a need to instate Nahuṣa as Indra—because the real Indra had been overcome by the sin of killing a brahmin (having slain both Triśiras and Vṛtra), and had become minute and powerless. In this version of the story, Nahuṣa yokes Agastya to his chariot and, as Agastya explains, gets cursed after touching him on the head with his foot (*atha mām aspṛśan mūrdhni pādenādharmapīḍitaḥ*, MBh 5.17.11). There is no mention of whipping here.

position, and he even went so far as to make the divine sages draw his chariot in turn. One day, it fell to Agastya to draw the heavenly chariot. The sage Bhṛgu was becoming rather fed up with the whole affair and devised the following stratagem. Since Nahuṣa had received from the god Brahmā the boon to subdue anyone whom he set his eyes on (cf. MBh 13.102.16–17), it was planned that Bhṛgu would hide in Agastya's matted hair, invisible to Nahuṣa, and then curse him. Agastya agreed, and allowed himself to be yoked to Nahuṣa's chariot:

> And Agastya did not get angry even though he was yoked by Nahuṣa. And the king drove him on with a whip, Bhārata, but the great-souled one (still) did not get angry; then, the king of the gods (Nahuṣa), furious, hit Agastya on the head with his left foot. When Agastya was hit on the head, Bhṛgu, hiding in (Agastya's) matted hair, grew furious and forcefully cursed the evil-minded Nahuṣa, saying: "Since, out of anger, you hit the great sage on his head with your foot, therefore quickly go to earth, having become a snake, you evil-minded one!" Then, having been told so, Nahuṣa indeed fell, having turned into a snake. (MBh 13.103.19–23)[49]

Yoking a sage to a chariot and whipping him as if he were a beast of burden is already offensive enough, but the last straw here is that Nahuṣa hits the sage with his left foot—the left side being considered as particularly inauspicious and impure. The offending king is then swiftly punished by means of a curse: Nahuṣa falls down from heaven, metamorphosed into a giant snake. He is subsequently freed from his curse by Yudhiṣṭhira, a story told in MBh 3.176. The form taken by the

[49] *na cukopa sa cāgastyo yukto 'pi nahuṣeṇa vai* |
taṃ tu rājā pratodena codayām āsa bhārata ||
na cukopa sa dharmātmā tataḥ pādena devarāṭ |
agastyasya tadā kruddho vāmenābhyahanac chiraḥ ||
tasmiñ śirasy abhihate sa jaṭāntargato bhṛguḥ |
śaśāpa balavat kruddho nahuṣaṃ pāpacetasam ||
bhṛgur uvāca
yasmāt padāhanaḥ krodhāc chirasīmaṃ mahāmunim |
tasmād āśu mahīṃ gaccha sarpo bhūtvā sudurmate ||
ity uktaḥ sa tadā tena sarpo bhūtvā papāta ha | MBh 13.103.19–23 |

punishment may first seem somewhat puzzling: why is Nahuṣa cursed to become a snake? A look at Manu may enlighten us:

> If a man raises his hand or a stick [against a man belonging to a higher caste], he should have his hand cut off; if in anger he strikes with his foot, he should have his foot cut off. (*Manusmṛti* 8.280)[50]

Since Nahuṣa raises both hand and foot against the sage, he is logically cursed to turn into a snake, a creature which has neither hands nor feet. The two stories we have just examined illustrate how hazardous it is for a king—even for Indra himself—to strike a brahmin. In both cases, the offender is swiftly punished by a curse commensurate with his crime and turned into a sub-human, cruel-natured being. But as a matter of fact, both Kalmāṣapāda and Nahuṣa are let off the hook rather lightly—comparatively speaking—for the Law books contemplate also other, more enduring forms of punishments for priest-beating. *Manusmṛti* 4.166, for instance, declares:

> If, in a rage, he intentionally strikes (a priest), even if it is only with a blade of grass, he is born in the wombs of evil people for twenty-one births.[51]

Cyavana, Kuśika and his wife (MBh 13.52–56)

If the two stories we have just examined deal with kings who manhandle brahmins, in the *Anuśāsanaparvan* we find two other stories staging the reverse situation: a brahmin sage yokes a royal couple—respectively the wife only—to a chariot and makes them drive him about, whipping them mercilessly. The first story is found in MBh 13.52–56. Yudhiṣṭhira questions Bhīṣma about the antecedents of Rāma Jāmadagnya. He particularly wants to know why Rāma could be a brahmin,

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[50] *pāṇim udyamya daṇḍaṃ vā pāṇiccedanam arhati* |
pādena praharan kopāt pādaccedanam arhati || *Manusmṛti* 8.280 ||

[51] *tāḍayitvā tṛṇenāpi saṃrambhād matipūrvakam* |
ekaviṃśatīm ājātīḥ pāpayoniṣu jāyate || *Manusmṛti* 4.166 ||

when he was born in the royal lineage of king Kuśika. Bhīṣma then tells him the following story. One day, king Kuśika and his wife were visited by the sage Cyavana. Cyavana settled in the royal household and started making extraordinary demands on the royal couple. The sage would sleep for the longest time, watched by the king and queen, then suddenly disappear, only to reappear and go to sleep again. Then he would ask for food but burn up the lavish dishes offered to him. Kuśika and his wife served him with total devotion for days and nights on end, foregoing all rest and food. Although they were completely exhausted and emaciated, they never got impatient or upset with him. One day, Cyavana yoked them to the king's heavy war-chariot and made them drive him through their kingdom under their subjects' horrified eyes, beating them with a vicious "three-pronged goad[52] with tips made of diamond-needles" (*tridaṃṣṭraṃ vajrasūcyagraṃ pratodaṃ,* MBh 13.53.32a) and giving away all their wealth:

> Even when they were suddenly driven onwards by a sharp-pointed goad and struck on the back and hips, they drew him unperturbed. Trembling, starved, emaciated for fifty nights, the heroic couple somehow drew that magnificent chariot. Severally and severely wounded, dripping with blood, they looked like two *kiṃśuka* (flame of the forest) trees in bloom, o King! (MBh 13.53.41–43)[53]

Finally, Cyavana declared himself pleased with the royal couple, healed their wounds, and gifted them boons. He bestowed young age and divine beauty on them and allowed them to spend time in a heavenly

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[52] This "three-pronged goad" reminds us of Śiva's trident (*triśūla*). Śiva is also known as *paśupati*, the lord of domestic animals (*paśu*), a condition which the hapless couple is here reduced to.

[53] *tau tīkṣṇāgreṇa sahasā pratodena pracoditau |*
pṛṣṭhe viddhau kaṭe caiva nirvikārau tam ūhatuḥ ||
vepamānau nirāhārau pañcāśadrātrakarśitau |
kathaṃcid ūhatur vīrau daṃpatī taṃ rathottamam ||
bahuśo bhṛśaviddhau tau kṣaramāṇau kṣatodbhavam |
dadṛśāte mahārāja puṣpitāv iva kiṃśukau || MBh 13.53.41–43 ||

forest. When the king ventured to ask him why he had behaved in this extraordinary manner, Cyavana explained that he had heard that in the future there would be a great confusion of caste between *kṣatriya*s and brahmins in Kuśika's line.[54] He had therefore decided to curse Kuśika and destroy his future lineage to prevent this from happening. But since the king and his wife behaved so blamelessly, he had to give up the idea because he could find no valid reason to curse them (!). As we see, the sage's justification for his outrageous behaviour is both far-fetched and far-removed in time, and hardly seems to justify the barbarous treatment inflicted on the long-suffering pair.

Durvāsas, Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī (MBh 13.144)

The same theme is taken up again in a nearly identical form in MBh 13.144. Yudhiṣṭhira questions Kṛṣṇa about the greatness of brahmins and how one should worship them. Kṛṣṇa then tells him a story he once told his own son Pradyumna. One day, Pradyumna came to him, enraged against certain brahmins, and asked his father to explain to him why brahmins were supposed to be so superior and respectable? After launching into a panegyric of brahmins, Kṛṣṇa proceeded to tell him the following story. One day, the sage Durvāsas[55] was roaming the three worlds, asking all and sundry who would dare to take him home and offer him hospitality, warning people that he was an excessively irascible host and difficult to please.[56] Since no one was com-

[54] Probably an allusion to the complicated history of Viśvāmitra and Rāma Jāmadagnya, both descendants of Kuśika: Viśvāmitra is born a king and becomes a brahmin, while Rāma Jāmadagnya is a brahmin who behaves like a warrior.

[55] Literally, "he who has bad clothes". Durvāsas is said to be clothed in bark or rags (*cīravāsā*), the ascetics' attire, in MBh 13.144.12.

[56] Durvāsas is well-known for his irascible nature. He is the one who curses the unfortunate Śakuntalā in Kālidāsa's play *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* (act 4, verse 1) when she fails to receive him with due rites of hospitality, being lost in thoughts about king Duṣyanta. But when served with devotion, he can be very generous. For instance, after she served him well in her father's house, he gifts Kuntī the boon whereby she may have a child from any god she chooses (MBh 1.113.32–35; 3.287–289).

ing forward to invite him, Kṛṣṇa decided to offer him his hospitality. Durvāsas came to his home and started behaving in the most bizarre fashion: eating tons of food, burning up things and even the servant girls! One day, after asking for rice-gruel, he made Kṛṣṇa smear his body with it, which he did without batting an eyelid. But Durvāsas did not stop there, as Kṛṣṇa tells his son:

> Then, he saw nearby your fair-faced mother, and, smiling, he smeared her too with gruel. Then the sage quickly yoked her to a chariot, her body smeared with gruel, and, after climbing onto the chariot, he went out of my house. Under my very eyes, that wise twice born one, blazing with the colour of fire, struck the young Rukmiṇī with a whip, as if she were an ox fit to be harnessed to a cart! But I did not harbour slightest ill-feeling born of spite (towards him). Then he went outside by the great royal highway. (MBh 13.144.23–26)[57]

He went on whipping the poor Rukmiṇī mercilessly under the townspeople's eyes, till she stumbled and fell on the path. Enraged, Durvāsas jumped down from the chariot and ran away, with Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī in hot pursuit and begging him to come back. Pacified, he declared himself pleased with their exemplary behaviour, restored everything he had broken or burnt, and gave them boons. To Rukmiṇī he gifted eternal youth and beauty, promising her that she would be Kṛṣṇa's spouse even in the next world. To Kṛṣṇa he promised that for all times to come he would be the beloved of the whole world. Kṛṣṇa would also be invulnerable on all the places of his body which he had smeared with gruel, but unfortunately, he had forgotten to smear the

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[57] *sa dadarśa tadābhyāśe mātaraṃ te śubhānanām |*
tām api smayamānaḥ sa pāyasenābhyalepayat ||
muniḥ pāyasadigdhāṅgīṃ rathe tūrṇam ayojayat |
tam āruhya rathaṃ caiva niryayau sa gṛhān mama ||
agnivarṇo jvalan dhīmān sa dvijo rathadhuryavat |
pratodenātudad bālāṃ rukmiṇīṃ mama paśyataḥ ||
na ca me stokam apy āsīd duḥkham īrṣyākṛtaṃ tadā |
tataḥ sa rājamārgeṇa mahatā niryayau bahiḥ || MBh 13.144.23–26 ||

soles of his feet.[58] After narrating this episode, Kṛṣṇa added that after his encounter with Durvāsas, he had always behaved with the utmost respect towards the brahmins, and he earnestly urged his successive interlocutors (Pradyumna and Yudhiṣṭhira) to do likewise.

Stephanie Jamison, who deals with these two stories in her book "Sacrificed Wife / Sacrificer's Wife" under the paradigm of "The Exploited Host," remarks:

> [E]ven a guest with benevolent intentions, a "good guest," can bring hardship on his host, and the potential for abuse of the host's mandated generosity is great. A "bad guest" can literally get away with murder. (Jamison 1996: 164)

She further comments on how these "houseguests from Hell," as she aptly calls them (*ibid*.: 168), subject their hosts "to a very public, almost symbolic act of humiliation," especially noting how often the women are made to bear the brunt of these ascetics' extraordinary demands. This is of course particularly striking in the case of Rukmiṇī, who alone is yoked to the chariot and goaded on. Interestingly, Jamison (*ibid*.) compares her smearing with rice milk to "a ritual, almost sacrificial act, as if a preparation of the woman as an oblation." Perhaps indeed, had her conduct been less exemplary, she would have ended up consumed by the fire of Durvāsas' wrath, like her servant-girls. Rukmiṇī's smearing with rice milk and being made to draw the chariot also reminds us of the punishment recommended by certain Law books for sexually misbehaving women, who should be smeared with ghee and paraded on a donkey (e.g., *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* 21.1–4). The way in which the virtuous Rukmiṇī is treated here is thus doubly insulting. Jamison concludes her analysis of such stories with the following remarks:

> I have by now examined enough Mahābhārata stories to demonstrate more than amply the value attached to yielding without complaint to any

[58] The passage thus provides an etiological explanation for Kṛṣṇa's strange manner of death, struck in the foot by a hunter's arrow (see MBh 16.5).

> demand of a guest, no matter how bizarre or painful. All the stories have the same basic structure: a visitor behaves outrageously and makes excessive demands, and when the host has sufficiently demonstrated that he can be pushed much further than seems fair, the visitor reveals himself as a divine figure, often Dharma and rewards the compliant host.
>
> The disguised divinity of the guest in these stories is a crucial feature. There is more of an incentive to practice unquestioning hospitality if every guest, especially the more trying among them, may actually be a god in disguise—as no doubt the Visiting Brahman lobby was well aware. (*ibid*.: 169)

These remarks are undoubtedly true and apply perfectly to some stories about "testing gods" who appear in disguise to put their devotees' faith on trial and then reward them if they behave as expected. However, in the above two stories we see that the brahmins are *not* in disguise. Not only do they appear quite straightforwardly in their own person, but they are even more powerful than gods, since Kṛṣṇa himself, who is systematically showcased as the supreme being in the MBh, submits without demur to the utmost humiliation inflicted by Durvāsas. As the townspeople murmur:

> "Only the brahmins will be victorious, and no other class at all! What other man would remain alive here, after climbing on this chariot?" (MBh 13.144.28)[59]

Besides, even though in the end the brahmin sages richly reward the *kṣatriya*-couples, their boons seem only grudgingly bestowed: Cyavana openly admits that he had come to curse Kuśika and destroy his lineage and sounds rather regretful that he did not achieve his end; Durvāsas' self-proclaimed aim in life is apparently to go about cursing everyone, and he offers no excuse for his behaviour. On the contrary, he seems proud of it! The inhuman, even sadistic way in which the

[59] *brāhmaṇā eva jāyeran nānyo varṇaḥ kathaṃ cana* |
ko hy enaṃ ratham āsthāya jīved anyaḥ pumān iha || MBh 13.144.28 ||

sages treat the hapless couples, which is very graphically elaborated upon in both stories, is given little or no valid justification at all.

Conclusions

As we see, we have come a long way from charioteers whipping their horses on the battlefield, to brahmin sages flogging kings yoked to their chariots. If we now recapitulate the tales we have examined so far, we can conclude with the following remarks: passages in which whipping occurs reveal that whipping, provided it is exercised with restraint, is "normal" only in the case of animals. This explains why, when a human being is beaten, he or she must first be brought down to the level of an animal. This happens even in some instances where whipping is merely used as a figure of speech, as in MBh 9.31.34 (quoted above). The comparison between Duryodhana, intolerant of Yudhiṣṭhira' goad-like words, with a horse who cannot bear the whip, shows that even metaphorical whipping can at times degrade the recipient of the verbal lashes to the rank of an animal. Elsewhere, in stories where humans are flogged in an actual deed, they are first reduced to the status of draught-animals, made to draw a cart, and whipped on from behind. Rukmiṇī is even explicitly compared to an "ox fit to be harnessed to a cart" (*rathadhuryavat,* MBh 13.144.25). The only exception is when the sage Śakti meets Kalmāṣapāda face to face on a narrow path and gets a whiplash from the king. This situation is probably explained by the fact that the king is driving his chariot, and impulsively uses the whip he is holding in his hand.

In many passages, wielding the whip denotes a low birth, as an untouchable, a farmer, or a charioteer. The only one who seems to escape this rule is Kṛṣṇa, who uses the whip as Arjuna's chariot-driver in the great war. Kṛṣṇa's function as a charioteer must of course be read metaphorically, as the Great Lord leading the sacrifice of war (see Feller 2004: 280). When *caṇḍāla*s or farmers mercilessly whip defenseless draught-animals, this is condemned as cruel. Yet at the same time, such cruelty is said to be characteristic of their low birth.

Doing harm is thus an inherent part of their job, one that they cannot be blamed for. Indra does not punish the cruel farmer: he merely produces violent rains forcing him to stop his work for the moment. As for the *caṇḍāla*s, both the Law books and the mother donkey voice the opinion that they are cruel by nature, and Mataṅga is not punished for his behaviour either: indeed, for him, learning about his low birth is punishment enough. In both stories, the ones who take pity on the tortured beasts of burden and take appropriate steps to make the cruel treatment stop are the victims' mothers. As elsewhere in Sanskrit literature, *karuṇa* or compassion is expressed by women: the voice of pathos is female.[60]

If we now turn to the instances where humans are whipped, we see that this happens only in the case of kings whipping brahmins, or brahmins whipping kings (and their wives). *Kṣatriya*s and *brāhmaṇa*s are of course the two classes who constantly vie for superiority in the epics. We see however that the outcome of their actions is unequal: if a king whips a brahmin, he is swiftly punished for this disrespectful behaviour and cursed in an appropriate fashion. But if a brahmin whips a royal couple after yoking them to a cart, they bear it meekly and literally take it lying down, for which they are richly rewarded. The moral of such tales is that if the fancy takes him, a brahmin sage needs little or no excuse for his outrageous conduct. Such stories are of course told in the context of self-professed praise of brahmins, a recurring topic throughout the great epic, but one which is particularly prominent in the *Anuśāsanaparvan*. They are meant to prove that brahmins are hierarchically above the kings, and here this superior position takes the symbolic, indeed, hyperbolic form of a sage yoking a royal couple to a chariot, flogging them, and making them draw him through town for all to see.

Furthermore, some of these narratives betray a reversal of habitual values: usually, the *kṣatriya*s are shown to be energetic and war-like, whereas the brahmins embody ideals of non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) and restraint (*kṣamā*). We remember the donkey mother's words to her son:

[60] See Feller 2009 and 2020.

> "There is no cruelty in a brahmin, a brahmin is said to be benevolent. He is the teacher and instructor of all beings, why would he hurt (anyone)?" (MBh 13.28.11)

The donkey mother's words are starkly belied in the stories where brahmin sages treat kings and queens in a merciless fashion. As we see, these tales betray internal contradictions in the MBh, even within a single book like the *Anuśāsanaparvan*: in some passages, cruel behaviour—like flogging defenseless animals—is said to be typical of the lower castes and considered to be unworthy of brahmins; in others, brahmins are fully justified when they behave in the same inhuman way, even on the flimsiest of motives. One wonders if, in their zeal to demonstrate their own superiority and power over all the other castes, and especially over kings, the brahmins did not sometimes get carried away and over-shot their self-set goal, ultimately discrediting instead of aggrandizing themselves.

These narratives also illustrate how intimately the *Anuśāsanaparvan* (which contains most of our stories) and the texts of Law, especially the *Manusmṛti,* are related and how the 13th book of the MBh articulates its discursive and narrative strategies. The *Anuśāsanaparvan* is not merely a *Dharmaśāstra* of sorts, enumerating lists of rules and precepts: as we have seen, it also contains numerous stories that are meant as illustrations of these laws, or, to go a step further, as mythical legitimization for the rules it lists. Such tales transpose the man-made moral and social precepts onto a mythical plane and make them appear as God-given and indisputable. Also, much to our delight, these very striking and graphical narratives make the 13th book of the great epic vastly more entertaining to read—and, to its own advantage, its lessons easier to remember—than dry enumerations of dos and don'ts.

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Split in *bhakti*, United in *bhakti*
Violence as Devotion in the Jaimini Cycle of Tales*

ABSTRACT: *Jaimini's Book of the Horse Sacrifice* (*Jaiminīya Āśvamēdhikaparvan*) is a late mediaeval Vaiṣṇava text that is unusual for several reasons. In this article we examine the interplay of violence, devotion and ritual in the Sanskrit *vorlage* and its Kannada transfiguration—the *Jaiminibhārata* of Lakṣmīśa (ca. 1500 CE). Violent emotions or extreme feelings are deeply imbricated in South Asia religious discourse. Extreme feeling is entangled with the history of texts that emerged as a result of interreligious and intra-religious debate. Our article puts forth the idea of violence as a mode of *bhakti* devotion, and we historicize the emergence of violence-as-*bhakti* in the Vaiṣṇava context, using the tale of Mayūradhvaja from Jaimini's Book.

KEYWORDS: violence, *bhakti*, devotion, *Jaiminibhārata*, Kannada

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Don't you take on
this thing called bhakti:
like a saw
it cuts when it goes
and it cuts again
when it comes.
If you risk your hand
with a cobra in a pitcher
will it let you
pass?

Basavaṇṇa, ca. 1175 CE[1]

Introduction

The Jaimini cycle of tales, at first glance appears to be a late mediaeval sequel to the *Mahābhārata* epic. Set after the great war of Kurukṣētra,[2] it narrates the victorious conquest of the Pāṇḍavas over a set of fictitious kingdoms, set in the frame of a horse sacrifice (*aśvamēdha*).[3] Starting from a (ca.) 12th-century Sanskrit version most commonly known as the *Jaiminīya Āśvamēdhikaparvan* (*Jaimini's Book of the Horse Sacrifice*, hereafter Jaimini's Book), this cycle of stories has taken different forms and lives[4,5]. Whereas the Sanskrit text has been

1 Ramanujan 1973: 79.
bhaktiyeṁbuda māḍabāradu,
karagasadaṁte hōgutta koredu, barutta koyvudu.
ghaṭasarpanalli kaiduḍukidaḍe hiḍivuda mābude kūḍalasaṁgamadēvā.
Samagra Vacana Saṁpuṭa Volume 1 Vacana number: 212
from https://vachana.sanchaya.net/ accessed 10.02.2024.

2 All translations if not indicated otherwise are by the authors. For the transliteration of Indic materials in this article, we use the modified Roman (ISO 15919) scheme recommended by Andrew Ollett and Sarah Pierce Taylor.

3 For a study of the Sanskrit Jaimini's Book and its vernacular renditions, see Koskikallio and Vielle 2001.

4 Derrett 1970 sets the date of Jaimini's Epic at the 12th century CE, we agree with this date. See section "*bhakti* as cooking" of our article for some concrete clues towards the date.

5 For a detailed account of the Epic of Jaimini and its many regional retellings., see Pillai 2024.

studied to some extent in relation to its *Mahābhārata* counterpart and its transmission history, the 15th-century Kannada version—the *Jaiminibhārata* of Lakṣmīśa (*Lakṣmīśa's Epic of Jaimini*, hereafter Lakṣmīśa's Epic)—has not yet received proper attention.[6] And this in spite of the central role of Lakṣmīśa's Epic in the religious and cultural life of early modern Karnataka.

Lakṣmīśa's Epic closely follows the Sanskrit Jaimini's Book in its structure and arrangement of episodes, but it is anything but a provincial reproduction. Composed in the hexadic *ṣaṭpadī* meter, Lakṣmīśa's Epic combines the *prabandha* (*mahākāvya*) format of high literary "middle-Kannada" with *purāṇa*-epic style stories adapted and localized from a Sanskrit archetype. Ever since it was written, Lakṣmīśa's Epic was and is one of the most popular texts in premodern Kannada, with an impressive intermedial afterlife in the history of Kannada literature and theatre.[7] Lakṣmīśa's Epic is one of the major sources for the Kannada *yakṣagāna* plays, matching the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*.[8] The tales of the Jaimini cycle[9] mark a salient turn in the Vaiṣṇava narrative texts, and capture some important dynamics between communities of religion and religious emotion.

Across the medieval period (12th–16th cent.) in South India we see a congeries of religious groups competing for space, authority, prestige and not the least, patronage. These rival groups were closely aware of each other's textual corpora, narrative, ritual and aesthetic practices; and they responded to each other in complex and interesting

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6 See Koskikallio and Vielle 2001 and Koskikallio 1993.

7 On the influence and significance of Lakṣmīśa's Epic in the Kannada literary ecumene, see Bronner and Keerthi 2023. The *locus classicus* on the date and the literary craft of Lakṣmīśa is Bendre 1979.

8 Some of the episodes from the Jaimini cycle that have been turned into *yakṣagāna* plays include the tales of *Yauvanāśva, Sudhanva-Haṁsadhvaja, Pramīla-Arjuna, Nīladhvaja, Candrahāsa, Tāmradhvaja-Mayūradhvaja, Babhruvāhana, Lava-Kuśa*.

9 While referring to particular aspects of the Sanskrit or Kannada texts, we refer to them as Jaimini's Book and Lakṣmīśa's Epic respectively. When we speak of the narrative materials shared by both, we refer to them collectively as the Jaimini cycle of tales.

ways.[10] Thus the Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava and Jaina traditions in late medieval South India, can best be understood as being intertexts—the different groups were each crafting their own narratives, practises and identities in response or reaction to that of the others.

The Sanskrit and the Kannada versions of Jaimini's cycle are both instantiations of this sort of dialogically produced text. Herein we see various shades of 'emotional *bhakti*' being manifested. This spectrum of devotion both aggregates and segregates, thereby forging novel community and sectarian identities. The communities of particular forms of emotional *bhakti* may escape textualized typologies, but are *as* real, sometimes more real. The episode of Mayūradhvaja which is the focus of our article, is a case in point. In this article we try to tease out the immanent religious tensions in the Sanskrit version and its developments in the Kannada retelling. Secondly, focusing on Mayūradhvaja's gory sacrifice we want to reflect on the place of emotion and violence in a world of *bhakti*.

This tale, like the others from the Jaimini cycle, uses a brand-new set of narratives and characters—the majority of which are hitherto unheard of. Furthermore, the narratives are constantly undergirt by a mesh of emotion, which needs careful attention.[11] More importantly, the Mayūradhvaja story presents a very early attestation (perhaps the earliest) of militant *bhakti* which is previously unseen in Vaiṣṇava literature.

Through our analysis of the Mayūradhvaja episode, we argue that the Jaimini cycle of tales inaugurates a new mode of militant devotion within the Vaiṣṇava literary universe. A mode wherein violence is a way to express devotional love and possibly grasp a glimpse of the god. This new understanding of *bhakti* relates to the idea of intense emotion of the devotee. We propose that the text does not merely provide a representation of *bhakti*, but rather an instantiation of it. Seen from the

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[10] For an instance of an interesting juxtaposition of Śiva and Viṣṇu from a 12th-century inscription, see Mucciarelli 2021: 75–76.

[11] One of the rare studies that analyses the particularities of emotion in sectarian texts is Anne Monius' (2004) work on the *Periyapurāṇam-Cīvakacintāmaṇi* dialogue, wherein she argues for a study of emotions, not as merely 'generic' aesthetic expressions, but as indicators of community-specific phenomenological experiences.

perspective of Aesthetics of Religion, the narrative is itself an act of *bhakti*.[12] Whereas previous scholarship recognises that *bhakti* is characterized by intense, even violent feelings, we aver that *bhakti is* that intense affective experience of cooking, melting, plunging, drowning.[13]

There are several valencies of violence in the *bhakti* of this text, operating at different levels. To elaborate, one level of violence is synchronic and centrifugal, and the author is asserting a militant Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*, as a counterpart to the already well-known Jaina and Śaiva models of violent *bhakti*.[14] While a prominent feature of Śiva-Rudra (also shared by his minions and devotees) is violence, the case of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa is different.[15] Viṣṇu may get violent for the welfare of his devotees, but there are hardly any instances of his devotees doing violent acts of devotion.[16]

There is another diachronic and internal component, wherein the puranic Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* is challenging and controverting older Vedic models of contact with the divine. Using the Mayūradhvaja episode from the Sanskrit and Kannada accounts of the Jaimini cycle, we will illustrate both these registers of violence.

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[12] Building on phenomenology and material culture, scholars have advocated for a novel approach to the study of religion whereby the sensorial and aesthetic experience play a central role. For an accessible introduction to Aesthetics of Religion, see Grieser and Johnston 2017.

[13] For the metaphor of melting in the emotional *bhakti* of the Tamil songs of the Vaiṣṇava Āḻvārs, see Hardy 1983: 294, 333 etc. The same notion is translated by the *Bhāgavatapurāṇam*, through frequent references to the mind-heart melting (*dravate* BMP 11.14.24, (*vi*)*drutacitta, anudruta-cetasas* BMP 10.41.28) and the mind-heart turning moist and liquid (*viklinna-hṛdaya* BMP 4.12.18, *klinnadhiyaḥ* etc.).

[14] Similarly, accounts of the "interventionist" adventures (*līlā*s) of Śiva in the Sanskrit *Śivapurāṇa* and the Tamil *Tiruvilaiyāṭal purāṇam* (see Harman 1981 for an account of the textual history of the Tamil text) may be seen as response texts to the very popular accounts of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa's many *avatāra*s—which are usually interventions made to save a devotee.

[15] Śiva's familiars include the sacrifice-destroying Vīrabhadra and the wild, antinomian Bhairava, and the belligerent demons Bāṇa and Rāvaṇa are his favored devotees. See Doniger 1981.

[16] We haven't been able to identify any instances of violent Vaiṣṇava devotees in the earlier sources such as the epics, the *Harivaṁśa* and the *Viṣṇu-* and *Bhāgavata- Purāṇa*s.

By considering both the Sanskrit and Kannada versions of the Mayūradhvaja episode, we aim at highlighting the gradual transformation of the dialogue between Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva narratives as well as the intensification of the emotional aesthetics within the narrative. Furthermore, this comparison is part of our larger collaborative investigation into the literary trends in Early Modern South India. It appears that literary works of this period demonstrate dramatic shifts in emotional articulacy and introspection.[17] Further, the choice of genre in both versions is significant: the Sanskrit text is in a rather plain epic-purāṇic style, whereas Lakṣmīśa's Epic is in the highest literary register, abounding in poetic *tours de force*.

Jaimini's Book of the Horse Sacrifice

As the name *Jaiminīya Āśvamēdhikaparvan* suggests, Jaimini's Book has a horse sacrifice (*aśvamēdha*) as its context and as the frame story. The events of this text are set after the great battle in the *Mahābhārata* epic. Yudhiṣṭhira, ridden with guilt at the large-scale carnage that he participated in, wants to do something in atonement. The author-cum-ancestor Vyāsa suggests that he perform a horse sacrifice. Yudhiṣṭhira is diffident about managing such a major sacrifice, but Vyāsa convinces him that with Kṛṣṇa's favor the whole endeavor will be successful. One of Yudhiṣṭhira's brothers—Arjuna or Bhīma—shall accompany the ritual horse as it goes from kingdom to kingdom. The condition of the horse sacrifice is that the rulers of these kingdoms either accept the sovereignty of Yudhiṣṭhira, or tie up the horse if they wish to challenge it. Most kings, out of fear or respect, would accept Yudhiṣṭhira as their overlord. Some confident ones would challenge his authority and tie up the horse.

[17] For some of the results of this research project, see Shulman 2023 and the articles in the special issue of "Cracow Indological Studies" focused on the self (Shulman and Sudyka 2022).

Each subplot within the Jaimini cycle of tales is usually the tale of one such intrepid ruler that challenged the authority of the Pāṇḍava emperor. As it turns out, all these challengers are devotees of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa, and are usually able to defeat Arjuna (or Bhīma, as the case may be), until the latter appeals to Kṛṣṇa for help. With his help, the Pāṇḍava is able to overcome the challenger, who accepts the suzerainty of Yudhiṣṭhira. The challenger-turned-ally king then joins the Pāṇḍava entourage as it sets out to the next kingdom, following the sacrificial horse.

Previous scholarship has interpreted this anthology of tales as being a "Bhāgavata" text—one that serves to glorify Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa. We read it somewhat differently, seeing it as a text that highlights the agency and potency of the devotee (*bhakta*)—and a particular kind of devotee—the fierce devotee, at that. This celebration of "fierce" devotion and fierce devotees, is in our opinion, a singular feature of the Jaimini cycle.

Fig. 1. Frame 1. Mayūradhvaja begins the *aśvamēdha* sacrifice. Frame 2. The two sacrificial horses clash. Frame 3. The armies led by Arjuna and Tāmradhvaja confront each other[18]

[18] https://archive.org/details/hIvG_m-2990-jaimini-adhmedh-jaimini-ashvamedhik-nirnay-sagar-press-1911-kavikulguru-k/page/n314/mode/2up (accessed on 26.06.2024).

The tale of Mayūradhvaja

One such fierce and weird tale in the Jaimini cycle, is the story of the devout king Mayūradhvaja. This episode perfectly illustrates the late-mediaeval militant strand of *bhakti* that we are interested in. When Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa reach the city of Ratnanagara, their sacrificial horse gets into a fight with another—one that belongs to the king Mayūradhvaja. Prince Tāmradhvaja, who is guarding his father's sacrificial horse, engages in a fight with Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa. After a long battle, Tāmradhvaja defeats them. He then reports this victory to his father, hoping to win his approbation. However, Mayūradhvaja is horrified at his son's misplaced priorities. In a pattern that recurs throughout this tale, we will see that king Mayūradhvaja berates his son for turning away Kṛṣṇa—the supreme god for the sake of an empty ritual such as a horse sacrifice. Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, meanwhile retreat to plan their next strategy. Kṛṣṇa's larger scheme of course, is to teach Arjuna modesty and devotional *bhakti*, through the example of the devout king Mayūradhvaja. Kṛṣṇa subjects the latter to a bizarre and extreme ordeal to make this point.

The following verse from Jaimini's Epic is king Mayūradhvaja's reprimand to his son Tāmradhvaja. The prince has captured the Pāṇḍavas' sacrificial horse, and thereby challenged their sovereignty. But the verses signal more than one rivalry.

Jaimini's Epic 44.30cd–31cd[19]
vētsi tvam ātmanō buddhiṃ dhanyāṃ turagasaṃgrahāt ||
tulasīkānanaṃ tyaktvā vijayā hi samāśritā |
varāṃ campakajāṃ mālām adhaḥ kṛtvā sumōhitaḥ ||
kas tu gṛhṇāti sarasō dhattūrakusumasrajam |

[Mayūradhvaja said]
"You consider yourself to be gloriously clever because you captured a horse? You rejected the [holy] tulasi grove and

[19] This numbering follows the Gita Press edition. Obviously, 44.30cd and 44.31ab should be read as one verse, and so on.

> resorted to cannabis (*vijayā*). Who, disenchanted, would cast off
> an excellent wreath of *campaka* flowers and eagerly accept
> a garland of Devils' weed?

This sarcastic verse invokes several aspects of mediaeval *bhakti,* all of interest to us.

Firstly, the ultimate royal ritual—the prestigious horse sacrifice—is rejected in exchange for a sighting (*darśana*) of Kṛṣṇa. King Mayūradhvaja reproaches his son that he has made a poor bargain. The unsuitability of this exchange is elaborated with two botanical images. One, it is as if Tāmradhvaja was offered a garland of holy tulasi leaves—the Vaiṣṇava plant *par excellence*—and he rejected it and accepted *vijayā* instead. Now *vijayā* is the marijuana plant (*Cannabis sativa*), which is disreputable for two reasons: one because it is an addictive drug, and, two more interestingly, because it is historically associated with Śiva.[20] In the subsequent verse, the horticultural harangue is repeated; this time by scolding Tāmradhvaja for exchanging a chaplet of beautiful, fragrant *campaka* flowers for the flowers of the thorny poisonous, psychotropic *datura*—another typical "Śaiva" plant.[21]

If the narrative purpose of the verse is to signal the rivalry between Tāmradhvaja and the Pāṇḍavas, the deliberately chosen image suggests to the audience the religious rivalry between the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva sects that must have been very topical to the text's immediate audience. This passage also gives a hint to the possible southern

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[20] For a detailed if somewhat ahistorical account of Śiva and cannabis in purāṇic literature, see Chapter III 'Śiva as a Hemp-smoker' in Sarkar 1974. Also, Aldrich 1977. For the most updated account of cannabis in South Asian medicine and history, see Wujastyk 2002, in spite of which, older, inaccurate histories e.g. Russo (2005) prevail.

[21] The Datura (*ummatam* in Tamil; from Sanskrit *unmatta* intoxicated) is a hallucinogenic plant associated with Śiva at least since the 8th century CE, as seen from Sanskrit and Tamil sources (Geeta and Gharaibeh 2007). The widely held view that it was introduced to South Asia from the New World by 16th-century European travellers, is of course wrong. As McHugh notes (2022: 184), a detailed cultural history of *dhattūra* in South Asia "[has] yet to be written."

provenance of the Sanskrit Jaimini's Epic. M. W. Carr's anthology of Telugu proverbs attests one that is strikingly similar to our verse in content as well as (potential) context: "It is as if a marijuana plant has sprung up in a bed of tulasi plants."[22] The proverb is invoked when someone is a black sheep, i.e. when their behavior or choices are entirely incongruent with the image of their family.

Turning to the treatment of this episode in the Kannada version, we see that Lakṣmīśa's Epic is in the ornate *mahākāvya* literary mode. He repeats many elements from the Sanskrit source and does more. He resorts to wordplay, and has Mayūradhvaja berating his son's bad judgement: Tāmradhvaja picked the equine *hari* over the divine Hari (*hari* being a synonym for a horse as well as for Kṛṣṇa).

akaṭa keḍisidan'alā kāryamaṁ namag'id'ē~
take yajñam innu namag'ī magaṁ pagey'alte
svakarasthanāda hariyaṁ biṭṭu kaṭṭidaṁ gardabhākṛti-hariyanu |
vikaḷamatiy'āgirdan'ītan' ēvēḷven'u~
tsukadiṁdam oḍagūḍi maṁcadoḷ prāṇanā~
yakan iral mared'oragid'adhamāṁganeya vol eṁd'avanipaṁ bisusuydanu ||

Lakṣmīśa's Epic 25.60

matte sutanaṁ nōḍi baidan elavo pōg~
'atta ninnaṁ mālpud'ēn'amala-tulasiyaṁ
duttiviḍid'abjamaṁ māṇdu datturada kusumada toḍavu gaṭṭuv'aṁte |
uttamav'ideṁdu kṛṣṇārjunara biṭṭu taṁ
~ditte turaṁgaṁgaḷaṁ sāk'innu yajña mava
~r'ettal'irdapar'eṁbudaṁ pēḷdoḍ'uḷuhidavan'eṁdu bhūpati suydanu ||

Lakṣmīśa's Epic 25.61.[23]

[22] 1102: *tulasi vanamulō gaṁjāyi mokka molicinaṭṭu*.
Like a hemp plant grown in a *tulasī* garden. Carr 1868: 197.

[23] Verse 25.61 presents great variation across the editions we consulted, line c in particular. We've followed the edition of Karibasavaśāstri (1917) for this verse. For a text-critical discussion of this verse, see Keerthi (forthcoming).

"Damn! My son has dashed my hopes.
Of what use is this sacrifice now? A son? He is an enemy.
He let go Hari who was in hand, and instead
captured an ass-shaped *hari*.
His mind is befuddled, what can I say?
This is like an ill-fated woman who snoozed away
when her lover came to bed
all passionate." the king sighed.

Further, he glared at his son and yelled
"Get out! What do I do with you? This is like
casting away a garland of lotuses entwined with spotless tulasi,
only to string together a wreath of venomous devil's weed.
I have had enough of this sacrifice.
You thought it was wise to leave behind
Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna and brought these colts instead?
Tell me where they are, and I will spare you!" the king sighed.

There are minor changes between the Sanskrit text Jaimini's Book and the Kannada text Lakṣmīśa's Epic. Instead of the inelegant repetition of the rebuke, with two separate plant images of 'bad bargains,' Lakṣmīśa's Epic has a mixed garland of tulasi and lotuses being rejected in favor of devil's weed. The lotus is a cosmopolitan flower that was used in the worship of all South Asian deities, and arguably, doesn't index any particular sectarian group. However, it takes special significance when mentioned in conjunction with tulasi. We increasingly see instances of bead-necklaces of lotus seeds and tulasi wood being used as markers of Vaiṣṇava affiliation after the 12th–13th centuries.[24]

The choice of the horse over Kṛṣṇa is framed by an analogy to picking the poisonous datura weed over the exalted and sacred garland of tulasi and lotus. The poem elaborates further on the bad bargain by introducing an interpersonal metaphor: the text stacks a domestic

[24] Kulkarni 2010–2011: 419–428. See also the section '*bhakti* as cooking' of this article.

analogy alongside the botanical ones—the errant son is compared to an imprudent woman who chose the pleasure of sleep over sex.

Fig. 2. Frame 1. Tāmradhvaja defeats the Pāṇḍava army, makes Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna faint, and takes away both horses. Frame 2. Prince Tāmradhvaja reports the events to Mayūradhvaja at the sacrificial pavilion[25]

This passage and the third analogy in particular, illustrate one hard-to-describe quality of literature inflected within a cosmos of *bhakti*. The Sanskrit Jaimini's Epic makes an understandable comparison of the bad choice with bad bargains in the plant world. This extra comparandum for the bad bargain is striking, even strange—dozing off instead of making love—and thus missing an opportunity for the highest physical pleasure, is the *upamēya* (comparandum) for missing an opportunity for the highest spiritual pleasure—meeting Kṛṣṇa.[26]

[25] https://archive.org/details/hIvG_m-2990-jaimini-adhmedh-jaimini-ashvamedhik-nirnay-sagar-press-1911-kavikulguru-k/page/n332/mode/2up (accessed on 26.06.2024).

[26] The conceptual overlap between sexual ecstasy and spiritual bliss is discussed in Olivelle 1997.

An older, more scholarly image, which may undergird this simile of the "missed chance" as well as other conceptual blends of sensuality and *bhakti*, comes from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. Describing the nature of liberation, the *Upaniṣad* says:

> It is like this. As a man embraced by a woman he loves, is oblivious to everything within or without, so this person embraced by the *prājña* (conscious, aware, self) consisting of knowledge is oblivious to everything within or without. Clearly, this is the aspect of his where all desires are fulfilled, where the self is the only desire, and which is free from desires and far from sorrows.[27]

While the similes in the two texts aren't quite identical, they draw upon the same conceptual metaphor. In the *Upaniṣad*, liberation which is the ultimate pleasure, is likened to sexual ecstasy—a person who is in unison with the conscious supreme Atman is no longer mindful of phenomena within or without themself, just as a person experiences sexual bliss in the company of their lover is oblivious to everything else.

A different aspect of the same image is mustered by Jaimini's cycle. Prince Tāmradhvaja has made the wrong choice: he chose to capture the Pāṇḍavas' sacrificial horse after defeating Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in a battle; presumably the correct choice would have been to submit to Kṛṣṇa, and then to bring him to Mayūradhvaja. The image Mayūradhvaja uses—of an ill-fated woman who chooses the inert dormancy of sleep over the heightened awareness of sexual pleasure—takes on newer significance when seen in light of the Upaniṣadic passage.

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[27] Olivelle 1998: 115.
tad yathā priyayā striyā saṃpariṣvaktō na bāhyaṃ kiṃcana vēda nāntaram |
ēvam ēvāyaṃ puruṣaḥ prājñēnātmanā saṃpariṣvaktō na bāhyaṃ kiṃcana vēda nāntaram |
tad vā asyaitad āptakāmam ātmakāmam akāmaṃ rūpam śōkāntaram ||
Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad 4.3.21 ||

The mechanisms of resemanticization and adaptation of the multiform *bhakti* that we see in this verse recur in the episode of Mayūradhvaja, and the rest of Jaimini's book. They spotlight the discursive strategies at play in the crosstalk across religious sects in medieval South India.

Three readings of *bhakti*

The entire Mayūradhvaja episode, as with most *bhakti* narratives, is polyvalent, and operating within nested frames: In the innermost frame, Kṛṣṇa is playing a trick to teach Arjuna about the merits of *bhakti*—through the illustration of Mayūradhvaja's sacrifice. In the next frame, it is Jaimini teaching Janamejaya about the importance of *bhakti*, through this and other stories. The outermost frame of course consists of readers, viewers and other audiences of the *Jaiminibhārata* tales—in part or whole, through any medium.[28]

In relation to the concept of knowledge transmission, the term *bhakti* has been "diffracted" into various semantic planes that partially overlap. Thus, the term *bhakti* sometimes conceals more than it illuminates. In order to disentangle the many semiotic threads, we conceptualize *bhakti* along three interpretative lines: *bhakti* as cooking, *bhakti* as division, and *bhakti* as indivisibility. Each of these interpretations correspond (more or less) to a section in the Mayūradhvaja episode. And it is along these themes that the next three subsections are framed. As our analysis will show, many other themes—the tension between ritual sacrifice and personal sacrifice, sarcasm as subversion, community and subjectivity—are constellated[29] around these notions of *bhakti*.

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[28] For Norman Cutler's conceptualisation of *bhakti* literature as communion, see Cutler 1987: 51.

[29] Benjamin 1985: 34 "Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars."

***bhakti* as cooking**

Humiliated by his defeat at the hands of prince Tāmradhvaja, Arjuna appeals to Kṛṣṇa for help. Kṛṣṇa devises a stratagem that will test the limits of Mayūradhvaja's adherence to duty and justice (*dharma*) as well as his devotion (*bhakti*), by asking for an extreme, unconditional sacrifice. However, the sacrifice that Kṛṣṇa demands is not a gift of an animal, or of gold or some such everyday gift that is usually sought from a king.[30]

Kṛṣṇa disguises himself as a Brahmin and Arjuna as his young apprentice. He seeks an audience with king Mayūradhvaja and narrates a tear-jerking story—The 'Brahmin' and his youthful son (and an apprentice) were going through Mayūradhvaja's kingdom, and were waylaid by a lion that took hold of the son. The 'Brahmin' appeals to the lion to let his young son go. It offers to release his son in exchange for half of the body of king Mayūradhvaja. Having told this tale, Kṛṣṇa, in the guise of the Brahmin, appears deeply embarrassed to ask for such a sacrifice of king Mayūradhvaja. The courtiers are horrified and protest the claim. The king however agrees without demur, and prepares himself for the ablation:

ēvam uktvā vacō rājā putraṃ rājyē nyavēśayat |
susnātō jāhnavītōyaiḥ śālagrāmaśilājalaiḥ ||
tulasīdalajāṃ mālāṃ kaṇṭhē kṛtvā hasann iva |
śaṅkhacakrāṅkitaṃ gātraṃ kṛtvā rājā mudānvitaḥ ||

Jaimini's Epic 45.44–45

[30] The whole episode of Kṛṣṇa appearing in disguise, making an extraordinary demand of the king (who by the way, is in the midst of his own horse sacrifice) harks back to an old pair of motifs. The first is that of the 'sacrifice interrupted.' See Heesterman 1993 and Minkowski 2001. The second, related motif is that of the sacrificer being subjected to a test or ordeal of sorts. The stories of Hariścandra and Śunaḥśēpha, of Śibi's ordeal with Indra and Agni, and Indra's demand of Karṇa come to mind. For overlaps of sacrifice and ordeal, see Yelle 2002, Brown 1972 and Brighenti 2012.

> The king (Mayūradhvaja) said this, and appointed his son (Tāmradhvaja) king; he then took a bath in the waters of the Ganga, and in the washings of the *śālagrāma* stones. Smiling as it were, he put a necklace of tulasi leaves around his neck and joyously marked his body with the marks of [Viṣṇu's] conch and disc.

This passage is interesting from the perspective of historicising Jaimini's Epic, as we have a reasonable sense of when these ritual practices became a part of the Vaiṣṇava personal liturgy. The Kannada rendition of this passage illustrates Lakṣmīśa's exercise of translation as commentary. He adds minor, but significant details, making the passage clearer to his audience, evoking a ritual that must have been very familiar to them.

kēḷdan avanīśvaraṁ pracchanna-bhūsuraṁ
pēḷda vṛttāṁtamaṁ kīrti nildudu narara
bāḷ diṭam'id'all'eṁdu niścaisi vipranaṁ karedu ninag'ī tanuvanu |
sīḷdu koṭṭapen eṁd'abhayav'ittu baḷika tā~
n'āḷd'iḷeyan ātmajaṁg'appaisi harṣamaṁ
tāḷd'anibar'ellaraṁ maṁṭapadoḷ'ihud'eṁdu kuḷḷirisi poramaṭṭanu ||

Lakṣmīśa's Epic 26.45

tarisi gaṁgā-tōyamaṁ majjanaṁgaidu
parama-sālagrāma-tīrthamaṁ kaikoṁḍu
taruṇa-tuḷasī-daḷada māleyaṁ kaṁdharadoḷ āṁtu maṁṭapake baṁdu |
nereda bhūsura-sabhege sāṣṭāṁgadiṁd'eragi
karayugaḷamaṁ mugidu niṁdu binnaisidaṁ
dharaṇīśvarāgraṇi mayūradhvajaṁ janādhīśa kēḷ kautukavanu ||

Lakṣmīśa's Epic 26.46

> The king (Mayūradhvaja) listened to the false Brahmin's account,
> and decided "The life of a human is uncertain, fame will last forever."
> He beckoned the Brahmin and assured him, "I will split this body
> in half and give it to you."
> He then entrusted his kingdom to his son and was pleased. He
> ordered that everyone be seated in the sacrificial chamber, and set out.

King [Janamejaya] listen to this wonder—
"The emperor Mayūradhvaja asked for waters of the Ganga and bathed,
he took the holy washings of the *sālagrāma* in his palm,*
he adorned a garland of fresh tulasi leaves round his neck, and came to the chamber;
he bowed down prostrate to the council of Brahmins;
he stood, hands joined in prayer, and entreated…"

Lakṣmīśa's craft in elaborating or condensing the narrative as he deems suitable, is evident in this passage. The Sanskrit text of Jaimini's Epic 45.44cd seems corrupt (or oblique in the very least)—when it says that Mayūradhvaja bathed in the waters of the Ganga and in the washings of the *sālagrāma* stone. A devout Vaiṣṇava is unlikely to bathe (in the literal sense of the term) with the waters sanctified by the *sālagrāma*—an aniconic form of Viṣṇu. They would receive such water reverentially in the right palm, and either sip it or sprinkle it over their head—in an act of ritual purification. Now the text of Jaimini's Epic 45.44cd may have intended to say this in a laconic style, but it is not immediately apparent. The Kannada author must have noted this textual difficulty, which is why he renders the passage as follows: Mayūradhvaja bathed in the waters of the Ganga (*majjanaṁgaidu*) and received the hallowed washings of the *sālagrāma* in his palm (*parama-sālagrāma-tīrthamaṁ kaikoṁḍu*).

One could say that Lakṣmīśa is being a good commentator, or even a good philologist here. He has noted a textual discrepancy, and while recasting it in his text, he 'silently' corrects and paraphrases it in a way that will make better sense for his audience.

Another small but significant change that Lakṣmīśa incorporates, is in his characterisation of Kṛṣṇa as he appears in this scene. The poet says that Mayūradhvaja listened to the words of the imposter Brahmin (*pracchanna bhūsuraṁ*). Later, in the same verse, he is described simply as a brahmin (*vipran*). But it is a discursive choice of Lakṣmīśa, whereby he reminds his audience of the divine mischief (*līlā*) that will serve a higher purpose. Kṛṣṇa's duplicity and the false tale he spins

will serve to shed light on the truth in Mayūradhvaja's enduring devotion (*bhakti*) and adherence to justice (*dharma*).

These variations, one may argue, are part of a larger poetic strategy. In these verses the poet brings his own (Vaiṣṇava) ritual experiences into the narrative, by referring to familiar objects and acts of the everyday personal ritual. By giving a dynamic 'action-centered' account of the moment, he activates a performative mode, and thereby invites the audience into an intimate, emotional way of listening to the story. This narrative device—of having a mythical character such as Mayūradhvaja perform rituals that must have been very familiar to the audience, is a narrative strategy that makes the epic narrative instantly relatable, even if in patches[31]: *bhakti*, as an emotion, acts not only on the king, in the narrative, but also on the audience in the metanarrative frame.

In both the Sanskrit and the Kannada versions, the king prepares himself through a series of actions. And this idea of a procedure, of an established and ordered set of actions, is strongly reminiscent of the process of cooking, which also involves an immersive, transformative and sensorial experience. The listeners have to have this emotional

[31] Mayūradhvaja prepares himself in exact conformity with the ritual 'dress code' prescribed for Vaiṣṇavas. As described in this popular verse from the *Padmapurāṇa:*

> *yē kaṇṭha-lagna-tulasī-nalināk̲ṣamālā yē bāhumūla-paricihnita-śaṅkha-cakrāḥ |*
> *yē vā lalāṭa-phalakē lasad-ūrdhvapuṇḍrās tē vaiṣṇavā bhuvanam āśu pavitrayanti ||*
> *Padmapurāṇam* 6.253.69
>
> Those with strings of Tulasi and lotus beads round their necks,
> with their shoulders branded with the conch and the wheel,
> and with their foreheads blazoned with the vertical mark—
> they are Vaiṣṇavas, and they sanctify the world instantly.

We find intertexts of this verse from the 12th century onwards, giving us a rough *terminus ad quem* for Jaimini's Book. On Śrīvaiṣṇava markings, see Akepiyapornchai 2023: 206–231.

attachment baked into them, so to speak.[32] Like the hard, inedible rice grains are transformed through cooking into soft, nourishing food (*anna, bhakta*); the devotees are subject to great emotional transformations: they are immersed, soaked, steeped, even boiled in the *rasa* of *bhakti*, and emerge cooked, ripened, tempered and seasoned.

The culinary metaphor is very productive in the world of affective devotion: the vocabulary of ripening, steeping, soaking, melting, scorching, searing and so on, is very much part of the *bhakti* landscape.[33] In the Jaimini cycle too, the phenomena of cooking, as well as the adjacent domains of tasting/savouring and devouring/consumption are conspicuously present—in literal as well as metaphorical functions. And a coextensive theme is that of craving, desire, and even more of need. The cooked food (and the seasoned *bhakta*) evokes the act of eating, and thus the archetypical need for nourishment: alimentary, spiritual, and otherwise.

bhakti as division

The second 'etymological' strand we explore is one of *bhakti* as 'division.' If passionate devotion to one god and an intense fellowship with other votaries of the same god are hallmarks of *bhakti,* the natural consequence of this is hostility towards other gods and their followers. In this sense, one instantiation of *bhakti*-as-division that is plain for everyone to see, is the emergence of a finer-grained stratification of religious identities.[34]

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[32] Charles Malamoud (1989) has thoroughly explored the strong connection between cooking and Vedic ritual, where he highlights the transformative aspect of both domains by stressing the conceptual similarity between being "baked" (*pakva*) as ready to be eaten and ritually cooked as being fit for the sacrifice. Along with the image of *tapa/tāpa* (heat, *askesis*), this analogy is continued and extended in the post-Vedic world of *bhakti*.

[33] See footnote 13.

[34] In the early stages of its development, Śaivism split into two major traditions: Atimārga and Mantramārga. The Atimārga stream, epitomized by the Pāśupatas, initially manifested in two distinctive groups: the Atyāśramins and the

In relation to the idea of division as a violent act, one salient feature of the medieval articulation of *bhakti* seems to be the violence inflicted towards oneself or a dear one. Readers of Jaimini's Book are sure to be struck by the frequency of violent forms of devotion in this Vaiṣṇava text. The Śaiva sources, on the other hand, present many such tales wherein devotees offer up parts of their self to Śiva (e.g. Rāvaṇa offers his heads, Kaṇṇappaṉ-Tiṉṉaṉ offers both his eyes), or even the life of a dear one (Ciṟutoṇḍaṉ-Siriyāḷa kills and cooks his son).[35] Put differently, the Jaimini cycle inaugurates the emergence of extreme love or rough devotion in the universe of Vaiṣṇava devotion.

And this is how it unfolds in the episode of Mayūradhvaja. Once Mayūradhvaja declares that he has made up his mind to sacrifice half of his body to the lion, to subject himself to a sort of vivisection, everybody is shocked. His courtiers and the council of brahmins protest that such a demand is unheard of, and that the life of the king is too precious to be sacrificed for the sake of a stranger. Mayūradhvaja's wife and son, meanwhile, take a different tack. In a passage reminiscent of the (Dharma)śāstric discourse of rules, exceptions and loopholes, they each try to reinterpret the "lion's" demand to their convenience.

In the following verses we see how both the wife and the son of Mayūradhvaja try to intervene and modify the course of the story by

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Mahāvratas (Sanderson 2006: 158). Conversely, the Mantramārgins represented a broader spectrum of Śaiva adherents, including worshippers of Śakti as well. From the 2nd to the 6th centuries, the doctrinal landscape featured a limited number of sects, notably including the Pāśupatas, Lākulas (also identified as Māhāvratas), and Kālamukhas, alongside other sects such as Śaivas and Kāpālikas (Sanderson 2006: 151). However, by the 12th century, the taxonomy of Śaiva sects had undergone significant expansion, as evidenced by the emergence of diverse categories, including but not limited to Kālāmukha, Trika, Kaula, Kāli, Pratyabhijñā, and Spanda (Sanderson 1988), in addition to the Vīra Śaivas (Sanderson 2014: 83). On the topic of Śaiva pluralism and sectarian identities, see, among others, Fisher 2017, and Cecil 2020.

[35] See, e.g. Shulman 1993 and Lorenzetti 2023. For *vaṉ-pakti* in Tamil Śaiva texts, see Vamadeva 1995. The violent nature of Śaiva *bhakti* may have to do with Śiva's own history as a wild, militant, even antinomian deity, for more on this see Ariav and Keerthi 2022.

offering themselves as surrogate victims (scapegoat in the original sense of the term) for the king.[36] Both try to defuse the violent demand of the pseudo-Brahmin-who-is-god with an intellectual response that relies on another form of violence, the cold violence of logic. But their attempts are nullified by Kṛṣṇa, who can speak the same authoritative language, and better.

tasyās tad vacanaṃ śrutvā vipraḥ prōvāca satvaraḥ ||
ēkāgramanasaṃ jñātvā rājānaṃ vākyakōvidaḥ |
vipra uvāca
siṃhēna kathitaṃ rājan vāmāṅgaṃ strī mahīpatēḥ ||
dakṣiṇāṅgaṃ pradēyaṃ mē vāmāṅgaṃ nīyatē katham |
śarīraṃ dakṣiṇāṅgaṃ mē dātuṃ siṃhāya cārhasi ||

Jaimini's Book 46.23cd–25

Realizing that the king was musing over the Queen's words
seriously, the eloquent Brahmin quipped. The Brahmin:
"The lion had said 'The wife is the left half of the king ['s body];
you should offer me the right half,' So, how can I take the left?
Please give me the right half for the lion."

brāhmaṇa uvāca
satyaṃ tvaṃ bhāṣasē putra vacaḥ kēsariṇaḥ śṛṇu ||
putrēṇa bhāryayā bhinnaṃ mayūradhvajamastakam |
dvidhā jātaṃ śarīrāddhi dakṣiṇāṅgaṃ tvam ānaya ||
kathaṃ tad anyathā kartuṃ śakyatē madvidhēna tu |

Jaimini's Book 46.32b–34a

The Brahmin: "Son, you are right. Listen to these words
of the lion, though. 'The head of Mayūradhvaja should be
cut in two by his son and wife. You should bring me the
right part of his body'. How can someone like me change this?"

[36] On substitution and stand-ins in sacrifice, see Doniger and Smith 1989: 189–224.

When the queen and prince Tāmradhvaja offer themselves as sacrificial surrogates, the Brahmin's plan is upset. He is desperate and grasps at hermeneutical straws, making up explanations or rules. He comes up with an emergency solution and pretends that the lion has given certain conditions as if he anticipated the queen's and son's offers. This narrative strategy works very well in the case of a pseudo-Brahmin as it evokes the śāstric logic by way of stretching it to the point of absurdity. The repetition of an absurd excuse in the case of the son is even more blatant in its *ad hoc* creation. Let us look at Lakṣmīśa's Kannada version.

nīṁ tiḷidud'ill'arasa viprēṁdran ariyaṉ̲ va~
nāṁtaradoḷ'ā siṁham eṁda nuḍi śāstra-si~
ddhāṁtam aṁgane puruṣan'ardhāṁgam eṁbudake ninna vāmāṁgiy'āda |
kāṁteyaṁ bēḍid'oḍe koydu kāyavan'īva
bhrāṁtiy'ētake nannan'asuverasi koṭṭu kaḷe
tāṁ taḷeven aidetanadiṁde sadgatiyan'eṁd'ā kumudvati nuḍidaḷu ||

Lakṣmīśa's Epic 26.56

"King, both you and the Brahmin have misunderstood
the words of that lion in the woods. The scriptures say
that a wife is half of her husband's body. So, when someone
asks for the woman who is the left half of your body, what is this madness about slashing
your body? Give my living breathing self and be done with it.
I will attain a good release by dying while my husband is alive."
So did Queen Kumudvati speak.

sammatam id'ahud'eṁdar'ellaruṁ bhūvaraṁ
summanire kaṁḍan'ī teranaṁ dvijatvamaṁ
nemmida mukuṁdan ele rāya ninn'arasi nuḍid'uttaravan oppabahudu |
summānadiṁ janēśvarana dakṣiṇabhāga~
mam melven eṁdā okkaṇisit'allade siṁha~
v'emm'oḍane vāmāṁgam eṁd'āḍit'ill'enal nṛpana sutan iṁt'eṁdanu ||

Lakṣmīśa's Epic 26.57

> Everyone [in the assembly] said "This is acceptable," but the king
> was silent. Krishna in the Brahmin's guise saw this
> and said "King! I may agree with your queen's solution.
> However, the lion told me that it would munch
> on the king's right half with relish, not the left."
> Then the king's son said the following.

In this passage, we see the role of the wife as a partner not only in royal functions, but also in ritual functions. As Stephanie Jamison has shown, the Vedic wife was an all-important agent and instrument of hospitality in ritual as well as quotidian settings.[37] It is because of this 'status,' that the queen intervenes, and challenges the pseudo-Brahmin's demand—not with tearful sentiment, but with intellectual rationalizations. She tries, so to say, to beat Kṛṣṇa on his own terms. Queen Kumudvati challenges the 'literal' interpretation of the lion's demand—which would entail her husband's death, and gives a hermeneutical twist to the tale. She does this by resorting to the scriptural doctrine (*śāstra-siddhāṁtam*) that a wife is one half of her husband's body (*aṁgane puruṣan'ardhāṁgam*). By offering up herself as a substitute, Kumudvati is hoping to hit three birds with one stone here—one, she can avert the death of her husband; two she can fulfil her role as the ritual wife (*patni*) par excellence. Finally, by dying before her husband, she will have the exalted status of the *aide* or *muttaide*.[38] Such an argumentative strategy is reminiscent of the long ritual and legal commentarial tradition. To that Kṛṣṇa is then forced to scrabble for an answer within the same framework; highlighting the

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[37] The wife, Jamison asserts, "in some sense embodies exchange relations. She is a mediating figure between different realms, and whenever ancient Indian ritual or mythology requires or depicts the perilous contact between realms, a woman is often the central figure" (Jamison 1996: 25).

[38] According to the Brahmanical tradition, the hallmark of a chaste (and hence fortunate) wife is that she will either predecease her husband or die at the same time as him. The terms used for such an auspicious woman are *aide*, *muttaide* (Kannada) and *sumaṅkali* (Tamil). See Narayanan 1990.

impromptu character of his rebuttal. After the wife's attempt is rejected, it is the turn of the son.

karuṇis'ele vipra ninnaṁ bēḍikoṁbe nāṁ
taruṇaṁ supuṣṭa-vapu tuṣṭi mṛgapatig'āga~
d'iradu tātana ṛṇa-trayake hariv'ahudu rāghava-bhīṣmar'aṁte kīrti |
sthirav'ahudu pitana bhāṣege nilal janakan ava~
taripan ātmajan'āgi taṁde makkaḷ ivar'oḷa~
g'erav'illa tann'aṁgamaṁ tegedukoḷḷ'eṁdu tāmradhvajaṁ nuḍidanu ||

Lakṣmīśa's Epic 26.58

Tāmradhvaja said "Brahmin, kindly heed my request. I am young, my healthy body will surely satisfy the lion. I will be able to repay the triple debts to my father. Fulfilling the promise of one's father will bring everlasting fame as it did for Rāma and Bhīṣma. The father is reborn as the son. There is no difference between a father and his sons. Please take my body."

bhūpāla kēḷ avana mātige mahīsuraṁ
kāpaṭyam ill'ele kumāra nīn'eṁda nuḍi
pāpi kēsari tannoḷ avanipana satiy'eṁdu sutan eṁdu pēḷdud'illa |
āpoḍe mayūradhvajana dakṣiṇāṁgamaṁ
tā putranaṁ biḍuven eṁdoḍ'illige baṁden
ī pariyoḷ'aḷukuvare kuḍabēḍa pōpen'ene naranāthan int'eṁdanu ||

Lakṣmīśa's epic 26.59

[Jaimini said] King, listen:
The Brahmin responded to his idea "Prince, what you say is reasonable. But the damned lion didn't ask me for the king's wife or son. I came here because it promised to release my son if I brought the right half of Mayūradhvaja's self. But if you are unwilling at this time, don't give it to me. I will leave." The king then responded […]

Prince Tāmradhvaja gets on the same hermeneutical bandwagon as his mother. He does one better, and resorts to the ultimate exegetic

strategy of citing from irrefutable sources. Tāmradhvaja first refers to how he will repay the "three debts" (*ṛṇa-traya*) that he owes his father by offering himself as a substitute. This is an allusion to the Dharmaśāstric "doctrine of debt."[39] Not content, Tāmradhvaja adduces a notion found in the Upaniṣads—that the son is identical or coeval with the father. The Kannada passage "the father is born as the son" (*janakan avataripan ātmajan'āgi*) unmistakably mirrors passages such as *ātmā vai putra nāmā 'si*.[40]

Readers of the *Mahābhārata* will find nothing incongruous in Kṣatriya princes and queens engaging in such exegetical duels with "officially" scholarly characters. We can safely assume that the audiences of the Kannada and Sanskrit Epic of Jaimini too, would have been amused and entertained by these clever arguments wherein a Brahmin is outsmarted (if only momentarily) by the arguments of Kumudvati and Tāmradhvaja. Amusement aside, their attempts at hermeneutic fancy footwork is not for a pedantic showdown. Rather it is a serious matter—one of saving Mayūradhvaja's life. At the same time, they have to find a means to uphold the principles of a king's Dharma of extending protection and hospitality to whoever seeks it.

The "Brahmin," cornered by Tāmradhvaja's eloquence and śāstric expertise, is at his wits end. We can see a hint of impatience in his response—he passes the blame on to the damned lion (*pāpi kēsari*), and says that it will only release the Brahmin's son if it is given (the right) half of Mayūradhvaja's body (*mayūradhvajana dakṣiṇāṁgamaṁ tā putranaṁ biḍuven*); and not any other hermeneutically defensible substitutes. The pseudo-Brahmin pretends to be offended at these attempts at backing out from the original promise, and offers to leave empty-handed. Of course this is a psychological tactic to force the king's hand.

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39 For the "doctrine of debt," see Olivelle 1993: 46–53.

40 See *Jaiminiya Gṛhyasūtra* 1.8.i–j: *ātmā vai putranāmāsi / sa jīva śaradaḥ śataṃ paśyāhi śaradaḥ śatam iti.* A slightly different version is found in *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* 2.10: *aṅgāt sambhavasi hṛdayād abhijāyasē ātmā vai putra-nāmāsi sa jīva śaradaḥ śatam.*

This section illustrates a particular narrative strategy employed often in Jaimini's cycle. The individual exchanges of the pseudo-Brahmin with each character turn by turn—the queen, the prince and finally king Mayūradhvaja, are not merely devices to pad out the storyline. The repetitions and intensifications of the arguments on both sides are used to decelerate the unfolding of the plot, thereby building up an unbearable tension, as the audience anticipates the inevitable. The narrative and poetic rhythm–marked by an oscillation between the danger of being beheaded and the delay of the climax—creates a *controtempo* mode, a syncopated movement.

The speaking head

All the sophistry of the queen and the prince are in vain. The pseudo-Brahmin's ploy works, and king Mayūradhvaja agrees to his macabre request and all its strange conditions: Mayūradhvaja has to give the right half of his body. He has to do this willingly, without shedding a tear or crying out in pain. Further, his wife and son have to personally cut his head in two with the saw.

This pair of prints depict the climactic scene from the episode of Mayūradhvaja. The first, simply titled "Mayūradhvaja," is from the famous studio of Raja Ravi Varma, and the latter—obviously an epigone, is from a few years after. In both versions, Mayūradhvaja is in a resolute and prayerful pose, while the queen and prince are slicing open his head. The Brahmins witnessing this ordeal are Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in disguise. The pictures are interesting as they illustrate a double exposure of sorts. We can see Kṛṣṇa in the guise of the Brahmin witnessing the sacrifice, as well as in his true form as Viṣṇu who appeared in the last moment, to prevent the carnage. The inclusion of this scene in the Ravi Varma press' influential gallery of images from Hindu mythical narratives, attests to the continued popularity of this tale.[41]

[41] For the influence of Ravi Varma's prints on Indian society and culture, see Pinney 2004 and Neumayer and Schelberger 2003.

Fig. 3. *Mayūradhvaja*, 19th century, oleograph[42]

[42] Ravi Varma Press, Ghatkopar, Published by Anant Shivaji Desai, Moti Bazar, Mumbai, Wikimedia Commons.

Fig. 4. *Mayuradhvaja-satyaparīkṣā* (Mayūradhvaja's Ordeal), 1931, oleograph[43]

[43] Published by A. K. Joshi and Company, Mumbai. https://images.squarespace-cdn.com/content/v1/5a608e4e017db2e8dedb242b/1601377136505-SXW80AE91IX-MH3X59DTE/IMG_9162.JPG?format=500w (accessed on 26.06.2024).

But the pictures do not give us the full picture. In the Kannada text, as Mayūradhvaja prepares himself for the "sacrifice," all his courtiers cry out in outrage "roaring like an ocean" (*aṁbōdhi-ghōṣadiṁd*), but to no avail.

staṁbha-dvayada naḍuve niṁda nṛpanaṁ tanna
saṁbhavanum arasiyuṁ piḍid'obbar'oṁdu kaḍe
~yiṁ bhāḷa-madhyamaṁ tīkṣṇa-karapatradiṁ gharagharane sīḷutiralu |
jaṁbharipunaṁdana-murārigaḷ beragādar
aṁbōdhi-ghōṣadiṁd'eddu hāhākāra
~diṁ bhayaṁgoṁḍ'oralutirdud'āsthānam ele bhūpa kēḷ kautukavanu ||

Lakṣmīśa's Epic 26.63

[Jaimini said] king, listen to this wonder: As the king
(Mayūradhvaja) stood between the two columns,
his wife and son each held one side and hacked the middle of his forehead
with a sharp saw that went "*gharaghara*."
Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa were stunned and
the assembly panicked, surging and roaring like an ocean.

To turn to the corresponding passage in the Sanskrit source, the queen and the prince hack the king's head in half, and a tear flows down Mayūradhvaja's left eye. The pseudo-Brahmin immediately interjects—"Ha! You seem to be unwilling for the sacrifice, and are shedding tears of grief" and makes as if to go. Meanwhile, Mayūradhvaja, whose head has already been cleaved, requests his wife to join the two halves together, so that he may speak to the Brahmin.

nṛpa uvāca
bhinnaṃ tvayā dhṛtaṃ bhadrē mastakaṃ māmakaṃ punaḥ |
tatō bravīmi viprēndraṃ vrajantaṃ kānanaṃ gṛhāt ||
mā gaccha muniśārdūla śrutvā yāhi vacō mama |

Jaimini's Book 46.52–53c

> The king: "Dear, you put together my skull that is sliced.
> And then I will address the Brahmin who is leaving
> our home to go to the forest." "Honored sage, do not go,
> listen to my words and you can then go."

The suspense that has built up in the audience is finally released and the crescendo of the syncopated movement gives in into the violence of the severing of the head which is portrayed in its full goriness. A split head is now speaking! What does this goriness entail when put in dialogue with the historical context of the religious rivalry between different sectarian communities? Going back to the idea of mapping the emergence and development of violence as religious emotion, we are tempted to see in the narrative structure and in the final episode of full-fledged goriness an answer to the display of violence that was a central feature of the immersive Śaiva experience.

Moreover, in this immersive and physical experience of the divine, the sensorial world comes to the foreground in its sonic instantiation. The materiality of the saw manifests its agency and in the screeching sound of the saw we might hear *bhakti* itself speaking.[44] If we keep our reading of the verse close to its material and phenomenological dimension, the cutting of the body in half offers more than a narrative about *bhakti*—an account that upon recitation will engender more *bhakti* in devout listeners. In this sense, we propose to think of the "vivisection of Mayūradhvaja" not as a second order, mediated experience of *bhakti*, but rather as an *immediate* one: the episode instantiates a certain form of being a *bhakta*, of "doing" or "performing" *bhakti*.

[44] Drawing on the new-materialist turn, a series of Religious Studies scholars have stressed the importance and the heuristic value of the experiential and material dimension in the study of religious phenomena. See, e.g. Meyer et al. 2010.

Fig. 5. Frame 1: The queen (named Śuddhamatī here) and prince Tāmradhvaja cleave king Mayūradhvaja in half, while Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna look on, disguised as Brahmins. Frame 2: Kṛṣṇa blesses the restored Mayūradhvaja, and offers both sacrificial horses to him[45]

bhakti as indivisibility

Mayūradhvaja's explanation for his tears is rather bland. He justifies them to the pseudo-Brahmin as follows: his left half is grieving because it will remain unused, whereas the right half is of use for a noble task. This display of superhuman generosity and piety is meant to move all audiences—the synchronic Arjuna, as well the many generations of diachronic readers and auditors. This is the grand finale, so to speak, even more charged than the moment of the cutting, since Mayūradhvaja's devotion has been subjected to an acid test, and he has proven worthy. Now Kṛṣṇa will shed the ploy and reveal his true self.

[45] https://archive.org/details/hIvG_m-2990-jaimini-adhmedh-jaimini-ashvamedhik-nirnay-sagar-press-1911-kavikulguru-k/page/n346/mode/1up (accessed on 26.06.2024).

One of the apparent paradoxes that *bhakti* accommodates is that of division and indivisibility at the same time. As a unifying force *bhakti* unites the community of devotees which in turn has a status of power that even surpasses the power of the deity. Indeed this power, emotional in nature, is activated by Mayūradhvaja's act. And to this Kṛṣṇa reacts by re-uniting the two halves thus manifesting the cohesive force of *bhakti*. As Wendy Doniger reminds us, "Beheading is seldom fatal in a Hindu myth" (Doniger 1995: 17). The power of the devotee and of devotion, Kṛṣṇa declares, is stronger than himself:

dēhārdhaṃ hi tvayā dattaṃ madvākyēna mahātmanā |
tava yajñē bhāviṣyāmi karmakartā mahāmatē ||
yasmād bhaktaparādhīnō jitō 'smi tava sūnunā |
yudhiṣṭhirasya turagaṃ gṛhāṇa tvam api sphuṭam ||
dvau hayau samayē hutvā kīrtiṃ prāpnuhi śōbhanām |
kidṛśas tava gātrasya bhedō 'yaṃ mama paśyataḥ ||

Jaimini's Book 45.61–62

[Kṛṣṇa said:] Noble man! at my request, you gave half your body.
Since I am beholden to my devotees and I was defeated by your son,
I will assist at your sacrifice. So take the horse of Yudhiṣṭhira as well,
and boldly sacrifice both horses, you will get splendid glory.
This (ordeal of) your body being halved—
how could it ever happen before my eyes?

In this final passage we see how it is only the violence of Mayūradhvaja's faith (*vīra-bhakti*) that can subvert the divine violence of the ordeal and turn it into compassion. As the body of Mayūradhvaja is being annealed, his unconditional love activates and reveals to the audiences (internal and external) *bhakti* to be the real agent of the story. In this sense, *bhakti* is more powerful than the gods themselves. Kṛṣna declares himself as enslaved to the *bhakta* (*bhaktaparādhīno*).[46]

[46] This expression clearly points out that Kṛṣṇa characterizes the king's sacrifice as not merely being done out of a sense of duty (*rājadharma*), but rather out of his *bhakti*.

The unmediated, unconditional offering of the devotee, demands an immediate, unconditional response from the deity.

This kind of *bhakti* does not allow for substitutions, as the very mechanism of substitution implies differentiation. Once again it is Mayūradhvaja who explains it through the iconic ritual of the horse sacrifice. Whereas at the beginning of our article the *aśvamēdha* constituted the reason for the king to scold his son by questioning his system of values and his logic of actions; here Mayūradhvaja goes back to the same context but in order to challenge Kṛṣṇa and the very idea of substitution in itself.

viśvēśa ninna śāśvata mūrtiyaṁ taḷeva
viśvāsadiṁde ninag'oppisiden'īgaḷ'ī
naśvara-śarīramaṁ sāk'ad'aṁtiral'innu tāṁ karmakartṛvāgi |
aśvamēdhaṁgaḷaṁ māḍidoḍ'enag'ave ni~
nn'ucchvāsadiṁd'ogeda maṁtrāḷigaḷ māta~
riśvamitra-jvāle poreyoḷ'ire bhēṣajavan'arasuvare himak'eṁdanu ||

Lakṣmīśa's Epic 26.74

Lord of the World! With the trust that I would
attain your eternal form, I now submit my temporary
body to you, I've had enough of it. If I ought to perform
Ashvamedha sacrifices as the main officiant,
for me they lie in the mantras that emerge from your breath.
With a blazing fire at hand, would one search for a remedy for the frosty cold?

suranadiya tōyam'ire nīr'aḍisi himajalake
parivaṁte ninna darśanam'irdumī mahā~
dhvarak'eḷasuvavan'alla tannumaṁ tanna satisutarumaṁ tannoḷirda |
turagaṁgaḷaṁ tanna yajñamaṁ yajñōpa~
karaṇaṁgaḷaṁ tanna rājyamaṁ tanna maṁ~
dirada sarvasvamaṁ ninna padak'arpisiden'eṁd'avaṁ kaimugidanu ||

Lakṣmīśa's Epic 26.76

> Mayūradhvaja joined his hands in prayer: "Would
> a thirsty person seek for dewdrops when the waters
> of the divine river Ganga are available? Similarly, having gotten your *darshan,*
> I am not going to exert myself on this sacrifice.
> My self, my wife and son, my sacrificial horse, my sacrifice
> and its provisions, my kingdom, and everything in my palace—I submit at your feet."

The placement of this episode of self-sacrifice in the context of the horse sacrifice (*aśvamēdha*) illustrates how the ritual logic can no longer be built around the sacrificial offerings, as that of the horse: it is now centred around the axis of the shared loving intention. We could read a historical statement of sorts—a declaration that śāstric ritual discourse is always trumped by emotion (Strength and Intellect are always conquered by surrender). The loving, feeling body is much more central as the agent-cum-instrument of *bhakti*, rather than the purely mentating intellectual head. And the tribute that Kṛṣṇa demands through the *personae* of the Brahmin and the tiger is precisely this: the splitting of the head. In some sense, the head has indeed been split. And being put back together, it has been rewired, so to speak. The conventional modes of cognition (of the brain) have been severed so that a new mode of understanding can emerge: feeling over argument.

We suggest then that the dialogue with Kṛṣṇa offers a way to re-conceptualize and re-appropriate the idea of sacrifice. The sacrificial act does not result from the application of a series of śāstric rules, but rather emerges as a form of unconditional love that dissolves/effaces the apparent differences: as the body of the king is reunited, so the rivalry among chieftains is transformed into devotion. Here the ultimate sovereign is *bhakti* itself. And in this sense, even more than Kṛṣṇa, it is the community of devotees that embodies the *bhakti* which in turn represents an agent of power. We might see how within such a configuration the aesthetic experience of violent *bhakti* can provide a medium of identity construction.

Conclusions

Violent emotions or extreme feelings are and have been part of South Asian religious discourse to various degrees. They are entangled with the history of genres and texts that emerged as a result of interreligious and intra-religious debates. In this article we focused on some early attestations of the relationship between violence and *bhakti* as a form of intense devotion in the Vaiṣṇava cultural sphere.

The Jaimini cycle has had a rich afterlife as it is attested by the efflorescence in the 15th–17th centuries of Jaimini stories translated in and adapted to different literary and performative genres.[47] Many of them present a modular nature, but the Kannada retelling of Lakṣmīśa's Epic retains the unity of whole text, as well as sharing several elements with the Sanskrit Jaimini's Book: its habitat in the Deccan region, and the socio-religious milieu of the Dvaita-Bhāgavata Vaiṣṇava community. Throughout the article we have put the Sanskrit and Kannada texts in dialogue to highlight the several nuances of religious stances and regional practices. In particular the analysis of the Lakṣmīśa's Epic, shows a further intensified emotional dimension, as exemplified by the roaring audience at the apical moment of severing of the head.

Lakṣmīśa's Epic is replete with all kinds of literary and scholarly games, in contrast to the workmanlike style of the Sanskrit source. This is quite deliberate, and Lakṣmīśa is using the figural and rhetorical toolkit of *kāvya* in synthesis with the narrative of Jaimini to bring about the textured psycho-aesthetic effects that we see in this poem.

One may be sceptical of the three interpretative lines that we parse *bhakti* along. How can it be about division *and* indivisibility (and about cooking!). But this is the nature of religion, and this is the nature of emotion—that they contain seemingly paradoxical things. The world of *bhakti* is indeed filled with several paradoxes, and we only draw upon that pool—it is at once deeply personal, and profoundly social. It can be intensely eirenic and extremely hostile at the same time.

[47] See Smith 1997 and Pillai 2024.

bhakti can indeed contain dichotomies as well as (seemingly) disparate values that come together in an assemblage.[48] By coming to terms with the textu(r)al variety of this assemblage, we can attend to how *bhakti* operates at different levels of the story.

Firstly, the story of Mayūradhavaja, both in its Sanskrit and Kannada versions, gives us a new way to bring emotion into the study of cultural and religious history. By conceiving violence as an emotion itself expressly in terms of an enactive, embodied agent. In our analysis of the imagery of violence in this text, we understand the violent request of the disguised Kṛṣṇa, and the violent self-sacrifice of Mayūradhavaja not as socio-political practices; or as didactic modes for explicating justice (*dharma*) or subverting hierarchy. Nor do we see this violence as a psychological state alone. As we have tried to demonstrate, violent action is performative of, but also formative of *bhakti*. If emotions represent not a state but rather a practice, then a gory head that is split open and then speaks, is not meant to refer to something else outside the text (as a metaphor would do), but instead serves as a performance. It enacts the willing self-sacrifice of the devotee, the internal split "dilemma" that the reader is experiencing. At the apical moment, while the king's head is being cut by the saw (*karapatra*), violence becomes throughout the trial of Mayūradhvaja something that is somaesthetic, tangible, embodied.[49] In this instance, the attention of the audience is stimulated by inserting the rasping sound of the fatal saw (*gharaghara*) in the poem. The iconic quality of the sacrifice scene is attested by its popularity in visual renditions of the Mayūradhvajas's story—this graphic scene seems to turn into a visual metonym for the whole narrative (see section "The speaking head").

Further, the Jaimini cycle not only represents a core narrative reservoir for the Vaiṣṇava religious discourse, but it also shows early traces of the emergence of violence as a discursive element in religious materials, in dialogue with Śaiva and Jaina discourses. In particular the episode of king Mayūradhvaja where a *bhakta* has to be subject

[48] On the concept of assemblage, see Deleuze and Guattari 1987.

[49] For a detailed history of self-sacrifice, see Storm 2015.

(voluntarily) to extreme violence as a form of devotion constitutes—as far as we know—is a novelty in the Vaiṣṇava narrative. As a striking case of extreme goriness within the Vaiṣṇava repertoire, the story offers a perfect locus to understand how the mechanisms of adaptation, re-use and intertextuality function as devices of self-demarcation and further as means to adumbrate religious or sectarian identities.

If we wish to historicize the emergence of violence as a religious marker, we have to frame it against the network of religious groups competing for patronage, authority and prestige. As we saw in the text, sectarian jibes are subtly encoded in Mayūradhvaja's scolding to his son. The king uses botanical comparisons to highlight the bad choice of his son. But the botanical he names are in turn charged with the religious semiotics of the Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva groups. In particular, the rivalry between Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva sects seems to orient this whole episode. The adoption of violence as a mode of *bhakti*—exemplified by the Mayūradhvaja's tale, but also several others in this text—then, can be interpreted as a Vaiṣṇava response to, and adaptation of, the Śaiva themes of harsh devotion (*vaṉ-toṉru, vīra-bhakti*).

The tale of Mayūradhvaja and his son Tāmradhvaja also illustrates effectively, how the esoteric mode of affective *bhakti* offered an alternative to the exoteric mode of Vedic ritual. The violent act of dismembering Mayūradhvaja represents an apotheosis of sorts. The controlled, acceptable ritual of offering an animal in the *yajña* (*paśumēdha,* in this case *aśvamēdha*) is replaced by a demand for another kind of sacrifice which momentarily regresses to an older form, with a human offering (*puruṣamēdha*). The litany of absurd, *ad hoc* conditions imposed by the pseudo-Brahmin, in rebuttal to the queen's and prince's offers further throw in relief, even satirise the tightly encoded ritual cosmos of Vedic sacrifice. It has to be half of the king's body. No wait, it has to be the right half. No wait, it has to be sawn in half by the queen and the prince themselves.

The queen's and prince's attempts to out-Brahmin the Brahmin fail. Kṛṣṇa offers a deliberate misreading of the tear shed by Mayūradhvaja as his wife and son saw him in half: Kṛṣṇa interprets it as a sign of the

latter's unwillingness; as a sign that it is not a gift given wholeheartedly, with enthusiastic consent, but rather out of some grudging sense of obligation. However, while Mayūradhvaja's head (and therefore brain) has been split in half, he is not in two minds. He isn't like Calvino's Cloven Viscount, who is ruptured into the malevolent Gramo and the kindly Buono, who confront each other in a duel, and are then put together again by a surgeon (Calvino 1998). Mayūradhvaja is whole in his *bhakti*-inflected resolve, and his eirenic submission neutralises the violence of Kṛṣṇa's ordeal.

But the story doesn't end here. After Kṛṣṇa appears in his true form, and makes Mayūradhvaja whole, there is one further test which completes the ring structure of this tale. As we see in Jaimini's Book 45.61–62 (see above), Kṛṣṇa offers Yudhiṣṭhira's sacrificial horse to Mayūradhvaja, and tells him to continue the horse sacrifice—this time with both horses. Kṛṣṇa even offers to assist him in this project. Mayūradhvaja however, is very clear that his purpose in life was to get *darśana* of Kṛṣṇa, and that the ritual sacrifice has little value for him. This section at the end dovetails nicely with the passage we saw at the beginning of this paper (see section "The tale of Mayūradhvaja"), wherein Mayūradhvaja rebukes Tāmradhvaja for his asinine judgement, that made him abandon the supreme Hari for an equine *hari*.

The legitimising function of the *aśvamēdha* which constitutes the frame of the whole Jaimini cycle is subtly challenged here. As a consequence, Mayūradhvaja does not accept Yudhiṣṭhira's sovereignty on the basis of having been defeated. Rather, he concedes the horse in recognition of their fellowship in the community of affective devotion to Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa.

Previous scholarship describes Jaimini's Book as "above all a theological or ideological apologia for ideas of bhakti and for the cult of Kṛṣṇa"(Koskikallio 1992) and as being "full of emotional Vaishnava bhakti" (Pillai 2024: 75). One could, though, see it differently. As Kṛṣṇa says at the end of the Mayūradhvaja episode, god is subordinate to his devotees (*bhaktaparādhīna*). Now, this is an important trend in the development of *bhakti* devotionalism highlighted by our episode—the increasing salience of the human in a *bhakti* world—as

individual (*toṇṭar*, *aṭiyār*, *śaraṇa*, *bhakta*, *bhāgavata*, *guru* etc.) and as a community. The hagiography seems to be a dominant literary genre of the 12–13th centuries in South Asia.[50] We are now able to situate Jaimini's epic as a congener of the Jaina and Śaiva hagiographies that canonizes a pantheon of teachers or saints. The Jaimini cycle presents a gallery of hitherto unknown devotees, who are soon incorporated into the pantheon of exemplary Vaiṣṇava devotees described in the early modern *Bhaktamāla* (circa 16th cent.).[51] This gives a literary-historical insight into the genre of the late-medieval hagiography: we can see these collections of tales as representing the contestation and competition of sectarian groups being reified in their narrative repertoires.

To conclude, let us look at the very end of the story where *bhakti* leaps on the scene as an all-encompassing force. The potency of *bhakti* is rooted in its emotional nature. Just as emotion trumps reason, indivisibility trumps separation. This ideology of emotion that contrasts with and conquers an excess of reasoning implies a new understanding of sacrifice. One that is based not on finding boundaries between things; but on identifying the overlap. Therefore, Kṛṣṇa too, is subject to the gravitational force of *bhakti* and the *bhakta*.

Within the discourse of indivisibility, Mayūradhvaja's tale brings up a familiar tension—that between Sacrifice with capital 'S' (sacrifice as *yāga*) and sacrifice with lower case 's' (sacrifice as *tyāga*). The difference between these two is thrown in sharp relief in the tale of Mayūradhvaja. The king almost entirely denies the older ritualistic model of *yāga*, which is mostly about mediacy, about finding ritually acceptable substituents that are conveyed to the gods through the intermediacy of priests, in a tightly regulated choreography of ritual. The ritual practice is framed in an intellectual space, and the hermeneutics of ritual performance and acceptable substitutions are all the remit of the learned priests.

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50 We have in mind, the Jaina hagiographies such as the Sanskrit *Triṣaṣṭhiśalākāpuruṣacaritra* of Hēmacandra (12th cent.), the Śaiva hagiographies such as the Tamil *Periyapurāṇam* of Cēkkiḻār (ca. 12th cent.), and Kannaḍa *ragaḷe*s of Harihara (13th cent.).

51 For an account of the *Bhaktamāla,* see Hare 2011.

The *bhakti* model of *tyāga* is in direct opposition to this. The devotee has a deeply personal, emotional relation with their god, and engages with their deity through distinct experiential, somatic and expressive modes. It is unthinkable that this would be mediated by a third person, and the paradigm of substitutes is not possible.

Throughout this tale, the leitmotif of Mayūradhvaja's discursive style has been about the *bhakta*'s discernment or wisdom in making the right choice, or to paraphrase, to choose the 'better' option. A higher register of this wisdom is the ability to know when a presented option is not a true option. So, at the beginning of the tale, he rebukes his son for fetching the horse instead of Kṛṣṇa, with a couple of charged analogies. In section "*bhakti* as division" and "*bhakti* as indivisibility" we saw how the queen and son attempt to offer themselves as substitutes instead of king Mayūradhvaja, only to be thwarted by Kṛṣṇa's śāstric logic: Mayūradhvaja would anyway not have let them stand in for him. Finally, when Kṛṣṇa puts Mayūradhvaja together, and offers that he should take both horses, and conduct two *aśvamēdha* sacrifices, we see Mayūradhvaja turning down the offer. And in a pair of verses that are remarkably similar to the scolding he gave his son. Using the now familiar device of weighing options, Mayūradhvaja says he has no use for sacrifices when he has seen Kṛṣṇa—whose every breath brings Vedic mantras into existence. He expands with analogies: when one has a warm fire by their side, is there any need to look for a remedy for the cold; when a thirsty person has the river Ganga at hand, why would they struggle to melt snow? These two verses complete the ring structure of the narrative, as it were.

If the episode began with a rebuke to prince Tāmradhvaja, who is raw and uncooked in his devotions (hence not fully *bhakta*), it comes to an end with a rebuke to god himself (section "*bhakti* as indivisibility", Lakṣmīśa's Epic 26.74). Mayūradhvaja schools Kṛṣṇa with impunity in the new paradigm of *bhakti* sacrifice, which has superseded the older one of Yajña Sacrifice. And God, who is no longer autonomous, but under the rule of his devotees (*bhaktaparādhīna*), has no choice, but to agree.

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Cruel Substances
On "Binding" and "Killing" in the Tamil Siddha Alchemical Texts*

ABSTRACT: In the paper, I examine the concept of "cruelty" (*kaṭumai*) of physical substances in the Tamil siddha alchemical literature, by taking as the starting point an analysis of the selected texts ascribed to Siddhar Yākōpu alias Rāmatēvar (ca. 17th–18th c.), a prominent author of the Tamil siddha alchemical tradition. The alchemical works of Yākōpu repeatedly describe certain alchemical operations, the names of which allude to acts of violence, such as "binding" (*kaṭṭutal*) and "killing" (*kollutal*). Such operations, according to the texts, should be mastered and performed by alchemists on various material substances. In the paper, I analyze passages that shed light on the purpose and character of such operations in the alchemical tradition of the Siddhars. I also address the issue of the non-human material agency related to the perspective of material ecocriticism as presented in the Tamil siddha texts.

KEYWORDS: siddha tradition, Tamil literature, alchemy, Siddhar Yākōpu, matter

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Introduction

In this paper, I will examine the concept of "cruelty" (*kaṭumai*[1]) ascribed to physical substances in the Tamil siddha alchemical literature. I am taking as the starting point an analysis of selected texts ascribed mostly to siddhar Yākōpu alias Rāmatēvar, the author dated tentatively to 17th–18th c., famous for his travels to Mecca in search of alchemical knowledge.[2] Yākōpu is one of the prominent figures in the tradition of the Tamil Siddhars,[3] and he is credited with more than seventeen works on traditional medicine, alchemy, yoga, religious practices, etc. His works are still highly valued today among traditional siddha practitioners in Tamil Nadu, and used in their medical practice. In this paper I will concentrate on the selected alchemical works of the Siddhar, namely *Cuṇṇakkāṇṭam āṟunūṟu* (*Six Hundred [Verses] on [Alchemical] Powders*, hereafter abbreviated as CuṇKāṇ), *Cuṇṇam muṉṉūṟu* (*Three Hundred [Verses] on [Alchemical] Powders*, hereafter abbreviated as CuṇMuṉ), *Kurunūl aimpattaintu* (*Fifty five [Verses] of the Book on Kuru*[4], hereafter abbreviated as KuNū), *Lōkacentūram*

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1 The noun *kaṭumai* means also: "severity," "strictness," "ferocity," "rapidity," "speed," "tenacity," "roughness," "excessiveness," "intensity," "anger," "heat," "strength," "sturdiness" (see *kaṭumai* in Tamil Lexicon (1924–1936)). I translate it as "cruelty" because, as will be shown further in this paper, the substances in the texts are indeed presented as cruel and violent.

2 On the figure of the Siddhar Yākōpu and autobiographical passages from his works, see Natarajan 2004, Kędzia 2016. For references to the travels to Mecca in Yākōpu's texts, see e.g., CuṇKāṇ 287, 379, CuṇMuṉ 151–152, VāVait 65. According to the autobiographical accounts, the Siddhar, first called Rāmatēvar, lived in South India in the region of Nagapattinam. Later, during his journey to Mecca, he converted to Islam and adopted a Muslim name, i.e., Yākōpu.

3 The Sanskrit term *siddha* literally means "perfected," "accomplished," "one who has attained supernatural powers (*siddhi*)." It refers to members of several groups found in India, in different historical periods, particularly after the 12th century CE, who share common set of beliefs and practices aimed at achieving immortality and perfection. The tradition of the Tamil Siddhars is one of the streams of the pan-Indian siddha tradition (see e.g., White 1996: 2, Sieler 2022, Little 2003: 14).

4 *Kuru* is the name of an alchemical substance. See below.

muṉṉūṟu (*Three Hundred [Verses] on the Metallic Centūram*[5] *Preparations*, hereafter abbreviated as 'LōCeṉ'), and *Taṇṭakam nūṟṟupattu* (*One Hundred and Ten [Verses] of the Helping Stick*, hereafter abbreviated as TaṇNūṟ).

The alchemical works of Yākōpu repeatedly describe certain alchemical operations, the names of which allude to the acts of violence, namely "binding" (*kaṭṭutal*[6]) and "killing" (*kollutal*). Such operations, according to the texts, should be mastered and performed by alchemists on various material substances, such as mercury, lead, iron salt, etc. In the paper, I will explore passages that shed light on their purpose and character, as well as the verses on the substances that are seen as important agents of such operations in the alchemical tradition of the Siddhars. Studying the concept of the cruelty of the materials that are able to bind and kill other substances, I will also address the issue of the non-human material agency and creativity of matter related to the perspective of material ecocriticism.[7]

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[5] The term *centūram* in the Tamil siddha alchemy refers to the class of preparations in the form of fine red powder produced during calcination. On the types of *centūram*s, see *centūram* in Sambasivam Pillai 1931–1994, v. 3. Cf. Subbarayappa 1997: 1844.

[6] The verb *kaṭṭu* means also f. ex. "to build, construct, fix, erect," "to support, sustain," "to harden, condense, coagulate" (see *kaṭṭu* in *Tamil Lexicon* (1924–1936)).

[7] Material ecocriticism reconsiders ideas such as agency, creativity, narrativity, etc., extending them to the physical world of the nonhuman matter, and therefore challenging the anthropocentric notions. This approach emphasizes the variety of the material agencies which interplay with humans; as Oppermann (2013: 64) puts it, "we dwell in a world crisscrossed by nonhuman agencies, which combine and collide with the agentic field of our species." In the Tamil siddha alchemical texts, the agency of matter is manifested, e.g., in the descriptions of the alchemical processes in which certain substances "kill" and "bind" other materials. As I will show, the texts anthropomorphize and even divinize some alchemical substances, crediting them with extraordinary agentive, creative, or destructive powers (see below). On the perspective of the material ecocriticism, see e.g., Iovino 2012, Iovino and Oppermann 2012a, 2012b, 2014, Sõrmus 2016; on the concept of material agency, see also e.g., Barad 2007.

Binding

The texts of Yākōpu present the formulae for operations of binding (*kaṭṭu*) of various substances, such as lead (*nākak kaṭṭu*, e.g., LōCeṉ 84), orpiment (*tāḷakak kaṭṭu*, e.g., CuṇMuṉ 106), borax (*veṅkārak kaṭṭu*, e.g.), etc. However, there are two kinds of binding which are credited with special status especially in Yākōpu's book CuṇKāṇ, namely the binding of salt (*uppuk kaṭṭu*), and the binding of mercury (*racak kaṭṭu*). Binding of salt is presented in the text (CuṇKāṇ 121–126) as a long procedure, performed on the common sea salt. The salt is first ground in the mortar with lemon juice for three days and left to dry in the sun. Then, the previously prepared substance called *cavukkāram*, which is presented as an important catalyst,[8] and two mercurial compounds, namely calomel (*vīram*) and corrosive sublimate (*pūram*), are mixed with acidic liquid containing saltpetre. Next, this preparation is ground with salt and the mixture is left to dry. Then the same amount of salt and lime are joined together, and they are used for coating the vessel containing previously prepared salt mixture. The vessel is left to dry in hot sun. Next, the obtained preparation is put in a separate vessel, between two layers of the lime of seashells. The alchemist praises Allah, and the preparation is heated in an oven. As a result, the bound salt is created.

The text calls the bound salt the "wealth" or the "cause" (*ētu*, CuṇKāṇ 121), which suggests that the substance is credited with special alchemical powers, enabling a Siddha alchemist to create gold, and causative potency, related to catalysing the production of other important preparations. CuṇKāṇ 366–374 provides a recipe for the object called the wand of salt (*uppu kēṭai*) which is prepared with the bound salt as the main ingredient. The wand is described as a mysterious item, composed of four plates, each of which is of different colour and made of the bound salt mixed with one of the four substances, namely sulphur (yellow plate), orpiment (red plate), vitriol (blue plate) and corrosive sublimate (white plate). An alchemist uses the wand during the pilgrimage to Mecca. During the travel, a pilgrim

[8] On *cavukkāram* see below.

takes, one by one, a little bit of each of the four plates of the wand and in the local blacksmiths' houses on his way to Mecca he easily creates fine gold to use for the living expenses during the travel. The bound salt is therefore presented as a wonderful and powerful tool provided with creative powers, which enables siddha practitioners to produce gold anytime needed.

The bound salt is compared to a diamond three times in one stanza (CuṇKāṇ 125). The text describes it in the following manner:

> In an excellent way, [the bound salt] **will harden like a diamond**. In abundance, it will produce thousands of alchemical preparations. It will **become like a valuable diamond**, [in regard to its colour] it will become like a pearl. Certainly, it will become **like a diamond jewel**, look![9]

The triple repetition of the comparison to a diamond emphasizes that the bound salt, similarly to the hardest mineral, becomes impenetrable and fixed. This also implies that binding is understood in the Siddhars' texts as an operation of rendering substances solid, hard and resistant to changes. The naming of the operation (*kaṭṭu*, "binding") further suggests that the substance subjected to the procedure becomes fully controllable and is prevented from spontaneous transformations, e.g., during heating. Additionally, the passage quoted above again highlights creativity ascribed to the bound salt, which can produce a substantial number of alchemical preparations.

It is also noteworthy that similar comparisons to a diamond appear as well in the context of the descriptions of the fulfilled alchemists, who have achieved immortality, for example, through the intake of the special panacea drug,[10] e.g.:

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[9] *kuṇamāka vayirampō liṟukiniṟkum*
koḷḷaiyitil vātamatu kōṭikkokkum
taṉamāṉa vayirampōl muttuppōlām
tāttikamāy vayiramaṇi pōlāmpāru (CuṇKāṇ 125). Emphasis added. All translations are mine.

[10] The passage refers to the intake of the "herbal panacea" (*mūli kaṟpam*), prepared with *āvārai* (*Cassia auriculata* L., see *āvārai* in Pandanus Database of

> If you eat this panacea for the period of 40 days, the body will be strong and become like a diamond. All the celestials have eaten this panacea before [and] their bodies became indestructible.[11]

The above quoted passage suggests that the comparison to a diamond in the context of the bound salt implies also the indestructibility and strength of the material, as well as its permanence. Comparisons similar to those that appear in the two translated passages suggest that the salt and an alchemist undergo alchemical processes, which lead to the common goal, i.e. to become imperishable, firm and perfected.[12]

Moreover, the bound salt is depicted in the text as a secret preparation. Yākōpu states that the material is not described in many texts. The author also reports that because he reveals the secrets of the bound salt in his books, the other Siddhars became angry with him (CuṇKāṇ 121). Such presentation of the preparation also suggests that it is seen in the Tamil siddha tradition as a very valuable and powerful substance.

Immensely important for the Tamil Siddhars is the operation of binding of mercury, which results in creation of the mercurial jewel (*raca maṇi*). As indicated several times in CuṇKāṇ (e.g., CuṇKāṇ 361, 404, 427), binding of mercury is one of the essential alchemical operations which an alchemist should master. It aims at rendering the liquid metal solid and hard. The texts of Yākōpu provide several recipes for the binding (e.g., CuṇKāṇ 428, 471, see Kędzia 2017: 133). According to the contemporary siddha practitioners, the jewel is worn on the neck, and is credited with powers that enhance meditational yogic practices.

Indian Plants (1998–2009), *civaṉvēmpu* (wiry indigo, see *civaṉārvēmpu* in *Tamil Lexicon* (1924–1936), and *vēṅkai* (*Pterocarpus marsupium* Roxb., see *vēṅkai* in Pandanus Database of Indian Plants (1998–2009), mixed with *muppu* (i.e., the mysterious catalytic substance, sometimes identified with *cavukkāram* (see below); see also *muppu* in Sambasivam Pillai 1931–1994, Vol. 5).

[11] *maṇṭalam ikkaṟpam koṇṭāyāṇāl*
vayirampōṟ ṟēkamatu valuttuppōkum
aṇṭarellāṅ koṇṭakaṟpa mitutāṉmuṉpu
aḻityāta tēkattō ṭirukkalāccu (KuNū 21)

[12] The theme of the adamantine body as a result of yogic practices appears also in the Sanskrit yogic literature. See Ondracka 2015.

It rubs into the skin, and it is believed to render the body imperishable, ever youthful, and prosperous.[13] According to CuṇMuṉ 66, the jewel enables one to achieve liberation as well as supernatural powers associated with yoga (*citti*)[14] and material wealth:

> Look, [with the mercurial jewel] everything that comes to [your] mind will be within [your] reach! There will be salvation, there will be wealth, and there will be supernatural powers.[15]

Binding of mercury allows an alchemist to prepare the magical mercurial pill (*kuḷikai*), which endows a person with an ability to fly (see e.g., CuṇKāṇ 287; CuṇMuṉ 154). Binding is presented as an operation that makes it possible to tame mercury, which otherwise is depicted as a swift, elusive, and unpredictable metal. For example, the passage CuṇMuṉ 153–156 refers to Yākōpu's fabulous pursuit of mercury which has escaped from the well of mercury (*racakkiṇaṟu*) located near Mecca when the Siddhar was trying to collect it; mercury runs away and the Siddhar must chase it beyond the boundries of the universe:[16]

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[13] Personal communication from Arumugam Sugumaran, collector of the Tamil siddha manuscripts and founder of the *Tamil Siddhars Heritage and Traditional Knowledge Research Foundation* and *Tamil Siddhars Manuscript Research Foundation*, Auroville 2018.

[14] *Citti* is a tamilized version of the Sanskrit noun *siddhi* (literally "accomplishment," "fulfilment," "personal success," "perfection," "supernatural power"), which in yogic traditions refers to extraordinary powers acquired through yogic practices. Jacobsen 2012 attests to the wide spread of the concept of the yogic powers in traditions related to various religions also beyond India. On the *siddhi* powers in the Sanskrit yogic literature, see Mallinson and Singleton 2017: 358–394. On the concept of the extraordinary powers in the Sanskrit medical texts in the context of the life-prolonging elixirs (*rasāyana*), see Wujastyk 2021.

[15] *kaṇṭukoḷḷu niṉaittatellāṅ kaiyiṟkūṭum*
katiyākum vitiyākuñ cittiyākum (CuṇMuṉ 66)
According to Siddhar Pōkar the mercurial jewel bestows immortal life: "There is no death for the one who has bound the semen of Śiva [i.e. mercury]." (...) *civaviṉtaik kaṭṭi ṉōrkku / orukālum cāvillai uṇmai tāṉē* (PōKaṟVi 60).

[16] The theme of the well of mercury is present also in the literature from beyond the Tamil siddha tradition. See White 1997.

> At the time of chasing the respectable mercury, immediately I flew to the higher universe. Without dispute, I caught the mercury and according to the method, I took it in an excellent way to the land of Mecca. With the prophets (*napimār*)[17] I added [to it] the powder of blue vitriol (*turucucuṇṇam*) in an equal measure, and truthfully, I have bound the mercury. I have obtained two fixed mercurial pills (*kuḷikai*).[18]

As evident in the presented examples, binding is thus an alchemical operation that aims at rendering substances fixed, stable, and controllable. Certain bound materials are used to prepare items credited with some fantastic features, such as e.g., the wand of salt, the mercurial jewel, or the mercurial pill.

Certain substances in the Tamil siddha alchemical tradition are credited with extraordinary capabilities of binding other substances. The Yākōpu's texts present a special substance called *cavukkāram* as a very important binding agent. *Cavukkāram* is a processed mixture of three main mineral ingredients.[19] The first, and the most important one, is described as a salty efflorescence, called *pūnīṟu*, which appears in special spatiotemporal conditions. It can be found on the sites of a salty ground during the three months of the Tamil calendar, i.e., *paṅkuṉi* (mid-March to mid-April), *cittirai* (mid-April to mid-May), and

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[17] In the literature of Yākōpu, the alchemical masters are often referred to as "prophets" (*napi*), which is related to the Siddhar's travels to Mecca, where the local Muslim alchemists taught him the alchemical knowledge. The term *napi* is the Tamil form of the Arabic *nabī* , the term that refers to the Islamic prophets, including Jesus and Muhammad, who according to the Quran have been sent by God to all the people. See *nabi* in Bowker 2003 and *nabī* in Esposito 2003.

[18] *pōtumē cūtamatu turattumpōtu*
tuṭiyāka mēlaṇṭam paṟantupōṉēṉ
vātumē ceyyāmal cūtantaṉṉai
vakaiyāka yeṭuttumē makkātēcam
cātuvāy vantuviṭṭēṉ napimārōṭē
cariyāṉa turucucuṇṇam vaittunāṉum
nītiyāy cūtattaik kaṭṭināṉum
nilaiyāṉa kuḷikaireṇṭu ceytiṭṭēṉē (CuṇMuṉ 155).

[19] For the recipes for *cavukkāram* in CuṇKāṇ see Kędzia 2022.

vaikāci (mid-May to mid-June),[20] at dawn or dusk. Two other ingredients for *cavukkāram* are: lime (*kaṟcuṇṇam*, *cuṇṇāmpu*) and saltpetre (*veṭiyuppu*) or rock-salt (*kalluppu*), described as salt rising out of the sea (CuṇKāṇ 287).

Cavukkāram is depicted as an essential material that enables a successful operation of binding. Yākōpu, in order to emphasize binding powers of *cavukkāram*, compares the operation of binding without the use of this substance to making a broom:

> Come and watch! Without *cavukkāram*, the binding will be [nothing more than] the binding of a huge broom! (…) Even if you are successful, without the salt [i.e., *cavukkāram*] the binding of any [substance] will be [nothing more] than the binding of a broom, learn this truth![21]

Brooms, not sophisticated items in themselves, are typically manufactured in Tamil Nadu by taking dry coconut leaves and simply binding them together with a string; as a result, they are not particularly solid or durable. Therefore, a failed alchemical operation unsuccessful due to the absence of the *cavukkāram*, is highlighted in the verse by comparing it to the unrefined act of fashioning a makeshift, impermanent broom. The passage, with the use of the negative picture of the flimsy object in the comparison, emphasizes the main goal of binding, which is the creation of hard, strong and solid material.

Killing

Another important alchemical operation described in the Tamil siddha texts is the killing (*kollutal*) of various substances, such as metals and minerals. In the alchemical Tamil siddha literature, killing refers to the

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[20] See e.g., CuṇKāṇ 10, 325, 386.

[21] *tōyntupār cavukkāra millākkaṭṭu*
coṟperiya vāṟukōṟ kaṭṭumākum
(…) *vāyntumē uppillāk kaṭṭuvellām*
vāṟukōl kaṭṭākum vaṇmaipāru (CuṇKāṇ 70. Cf. Kędzia 2022: 74).

operation of reducing substances to the form of fine powder, during calcination of the previously prepared mixtures of metals, minerals and herbal juices, with the use of earthen capsules heated in fire. Substances subjected to this operation "die" (*cākum*, CuṇKāṇ 571), which probably refers to complete transformation of their previous material appearance and qualities. The killed substances, in an amorphous form of incinerated powder, are, according to the beliefs of the Siddhars, a more powerful and digestible version of the metals and materials. The siddha literature often speaks of the killed substances as *cuṇṇam*s or *cuṉṉam*s ("powders"). Siddha practitioners claim that such calcined materials, which are often prepared with metals or toxic minerals, are edible and devoid of any toxic properties. They are employed also nowadays in the siddha medicine for internal use (e.g., *veṭiyuppu cuṇṇam*, see *Citta maruntukaḷiṉ ceymuṟai* 2013: 207). The calcined powders, being the result of the "killing," are, in the Tamil siddha literature, an object of comparison for fulfilled yogis, as, similarly to the successful yoga practitioners with firm body and mind, incinerated substances are not subjected to transformations, such as decay:

> The perfect prophets (*napimārkaḷ*)[22] experienced the alchemy. In order to achieve perfection, **they attained the quality of the [alchemical] powder (*cuṇṇam*)**. The yogis understood the body and achieved firmness. They achieved the perfection of the great ones who saw [many] eons [i.e., the immortal Siddhars].[23]

The comparison in the above quoted passage suggests that the killed materials are resistant to changes caused by the passage of time;

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[22] Although, as already mentioned, the term *napi* refers to the Muslim prophets, it is evident in the texts of Yākōpu that the appellation *napi* is used not only in the reference to the Arabic alchemists, but also other fulfilled siddha alchemists and yogis.

[23] *pākattōr napimārkaḷ vāraṅkaṇṭōr*
pakkuvamāyc cuṇṇameṉṟa patamuṟṟōrkaḷ
yōkattōr karuvaṟintōr uṟutiperṟṟōr
yukaṅkaṇṭa pērkaḷuṭa pātamperṟṟōr (CuṇMuṉ 160). Emphasis added.

in other words, they cannot be further transformed. As such, they are seen as perfected, just as the fulfilled yogis.

Similarly, as in the context of the alchemical binding, the texts present certain materials as essential for effecting the killing on other substances. A remarkable example of such killing material is the already mentioned *cavukkāram* that underwent proper processing. According to Yākōpu, *cavukkāram* kills all substances, for example cinnabar, orpiment, realgar, or sulphur. The Siddhar describes its incinerating (i.e., killing) capabilities, for example, in the following verse:

> Look, *cavukkāra vaḻalai*[24] came into being. In its presence, all substances turn into ashes. Look and understand, in a moment all the metals turn into ashes. In contact [with] a little bit [of it], copper immediately turns into ashes. (…) Like the Sun, this powder is the [embodiment of] power for the people of the Earth.[25]

Another substance presented as an especially effective agent of killing is *kuru*[26]. TaṇNūṟ 59 provides a recipe for this preparation, which is produced with *muppu*, i.e., the secret catalyst sometimes identified with the already mentioned *cavukkāram*.[27] *Kuru* is a result of incineration of *muppu* mixed with herbal and metallic ingredients during

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[24] *vaḻalai* is a synonym of *cavukkāram* (see CuṇKāṇ 78, which provides also other secret names of *cavukkāram*). Both synonymous names of the substance appear in the same verse probably to maintain the metrical pattern.

[25] *parintupār cavukkāra vaḻalaiyāccu*
paṭumuṉṉē carakkellām nīṟippōkum
arintupār lōkamellā muṭaṇēnīṟum
aṇuvaḻavu toṭṭavuṭaṇ cempunīṟum
(…) *pakalavaṉpōṟ patiyākum pārilōrkkuc*
(…) *iccuṇṇan tiṟamatākum* (CuṇKāṇ 90)

[26] The name of this substance is an ambiguous term, as *kuru* denotes "brilliancy," "lustre," "excellence," "guru," "heaviness" etc. See *kuru* in Tamil Lexicon (1924–1936).

[27] TaṇNūṟ 55-56 presents this substance as a mysterious material, stating enigmatically that it is identified with the universe (*aṇṭam*), and endowed with amazing all-controlling power, to which the whole world is subservient.

heating in clay capsules placed in the fire.[28] The text emphasizes its ability to kill other substances:

> Come close, dear, *kuru* will appear after incineration [of the previously mentioned ingredients]. Indeed, it will kill all substances that [you can] think of. Dear, *kuru* by its grace will kill sixty-four great ones[29]. As soon as you see it, be cautious![30]

The text depicts the substance as an aggressive agent of killing of all the imaginable substances, which highlights its extraordinary alchemical activity. The passage describes *kuru* as an active agent of the alchemical operation, rather than a passive material. At the same time, *kuru* is presented as an item dangerous also for humans, as an alchemist is warned to stay alert immediately after the substance appears in the production process. This indicates that it has influence not only on lifeless matter, but living beings as well.

Cruelty

Ability of the substances to kill and to bind other materials is viewed as very desirable by the Siddhars. Substances which are capable of causing a transformation, such as binding and killing, on other alchemical ingredients, are described as cruel in the siddha literature. Their cruelty (*koṭumai*) is presented in the alchemical literature as a quality that an alchemist should strive to increase. For example, in one of the recipes for *cavukkāram* Yākōpu describes special procedure, which enhances the cruelty of this material. The text depicts the production of *cavukkāram* with the use of a special kind of white rock, which

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[28] Cf. KuNū, which also provides a recipe for *kuru*.

[29] The text probably refers to sixty-four poisons. See below, footnote 35.

[30] *nērappā nīṟiyatu kuruvumākum*
niṉaittacarak kellāntāṉ kolluntāṉē (TaṇNūṟ 59)
kollumappā aṟupattu nālupēraik
kuruvaruḷāṟ kaṇṭavuṭaṉ pataṉpaṇṇu (TaṇNūṟ 60)

needs to be dug out from the brackish earth that generates salty efflorescence (i.e., the already mentioned *pūnīṟu*):

> Listen to the procedure. After dissolving [the *cavukkāram* components] in water, place the stone [in the prepared liquid], so that [the liquid] consumes it. Keep it [in the liquid] for three days. If you boil it until it is bubbling in order to achieve cruelty, the white stone coagulates, to make you successful. Look, it will become the great *vētāntakkal* [i.e., the stone of Vedanta]![31]

The text suggests that attaining cruelty is related to attaining special powers by the substance because the stone, being the effect of the operation that boosts cruelty of *cavukkāram* as indicated by its name, is presented as a mysterious item, related to sacred knowledge.[32] The final product of the operation, i.e. *cavukkāram*, is called in the following passages "the cruel one that stays in the poison" (*nañcil niṉṟa koṭiyōṉ*). The cruelty is therefore presented as a crucial quality of *cavukkāram*.

This kind of cruel substances are in the Tamil siddha tradition indeed described as fierce, enraged and dangerous as they are compared e.g., to a tiger (e.g., CuṇKāṇ 50, 56, 181[33]), or even more evocatively, to

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[31] (…) *karaittapiṉpu nāṭṭaṅkēḷu*
kallavē kalliṭṭut tirināḷvaittuk
kaṭumaipeṟak kumuṟavē kāyacciṭṭākkā
vellavē veḷḷaikkal kaṭṭippōkum
vētāntak kallākum viḷaṅkippārē (CuṇKāṇ 27). See Kędzia 2022.

[32] It is called the "stone of Vedanta," i.e., "the conclusion of the Vedas."

[33] In the verse CuṇKāṇ 181, the cruel alchemical powder (*kaṭuñcuṇṇam*) is compared to the tiger, whereas the substance subjected to its action or mercury, is presented as a goat. The binding of the metal is dramatically depicted through the employment of the simile of a frightened goat frozen in its tracks when faced with a tiger:
"[The powder] will become like a young tiger, mercury will become like a mature goat frozen in fear to protect [itself]. It will become a bead [i.e., it will be bound in the form of the mercurial jewel]." (*ciṉṉameṉṟa vēṅkaipōlām / kaṉivāṉa āṭupōl kalaṅkiniṟkum/ pātiṭavē cūtamatu uṇṭaiyākum*, CuṇKāṇ 181).

the Death personified. For example, Yākōpu describes preparation with *cavukkāram* in the following manner:

> [As a result of the previously described operation] the enraged [*cavukkāram*] powder will appear. If you take it with [your] hand, the hand will [be] ripped apart. Do not go astray! If it [i.e., the *cavukkāram* powder] falls on the body, [the body] will tear apart. [This is] *cavukkāram*. This powder is equal to Namaṉ (i.e., the Death).[34]

In another passage Yākōpu presents the preparation with *cavukkāram* as a ruthless killer, as "it will kill (…) all substances without [any] quivering" (*carakkellām* (…) *pataiyāmal kollum*, CuṇKāṇ 253). Yet another passage (CuṇKāṇ 27) highlights the cruelty, strength and fiery nature of *cavukkāram*, connecting cruelty with killing and binding. The passage refers to the calcined preparation with *cavukkāram* that has been previously described in the text:

> [The previously described preparation with *cavukkāram*] will become a powder. (…) [Its] causticity will rise and rise, in order to increase [its] strength in all branches [of alchemy, medicine, etc.]. [It] will become the cruel one for all the branches [of alchemy, medicine, etc.] (…). Look, it will become a fiery and strong one! In it, substances of [various] classes will become bound. (…) All the sixty-four [poisons][35] will die (…). Indeed, rock salt will die in it. Friendly sal ammoniac will become bound. After becoming bound, corrosive sublimate will become like a jewel. Calomel

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[34] (…) *kaṭuñcuṇṇa mākuṅkaiyil*
tāṉeṭuttāl kaiyatuvum virintupōkum
ēṅkiyē tiriyātē caṭattiṟpaṭṭāl
itamāka virintuviṭum cavukkārantāṉ
pāṅkiyēyic cuṇṇamatu namaṇōṭōppām (CuṇKāṇ 89)

[35] Tamil siddha alchemy traditionally recognizes sixty-four poisons (*pāṣāṇam*), such as arsenic and arsenical preparations. The poisons are used in the siddha alchemy and medicine, after proper processing. The poisons are divided into two main subgroups, i.e. native poisons (32 kinds) and prepared poisons (32 kinds). The list of all sixty four poisons is provided by Sambasivam Pillai (see *pāṣāṇam* in Sambasivam Pillai 1931–1994, v. 5), cf. Thiagarajan 2008: 11–16.

> will be calcined. (…) All the minerals will be well calcined. (…) All the supernatural powers will occur.[36]

The text emphasizes untamed nature of *cavukkāram*, which is presented as a powerful agent of alchemical transformations of other materials. It is depicted as a dangerous entity, but also as a source of the supernatural powers (*citti*) which the siddha practitioners aim to attain.

It is noteworthy that the operations called killing (Skt. *māraṇa*) and binding (Skt. *bandhana*) are also described in the Sanskrit alchemical literature (see White 1996: 265). Binding in the Sanskrit texts also refers to the operation aimed at stabilization of mercury, which otherwise remains volatile and not resistant to heating (cf. *Rasaratnasamuccaya* 11.60, quoted by Chandra Murthy 2013: 159). The twenty-five or twenty-six alchemical bonds (Skt. *bandha*), i.e., the effects of the binding of mercury, have also medical applications (see e.g., Angadi 2014: 119–128, cf. Chandra Murthy 2013: 160–161). Killing in the Sanskrit alchemical texts refers to the operation of reducing metals or minerals to fine ashes (*bhasma*), by subjecting them to various procedures with the use of herbal preparations and then heating them (Angadi 2014: 24). Killed mercury is credited with rejuvenating properties and amazing abilities of transmutation (see Chandra Murthy 2013: 164, White 1996: 267). Although the sixteen or eighteen

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[36] *cuṇṇamān tuṟaikkellāṅ kāramēṟṟat*
(…) *kaṭuṅkāra mēṟumēṟum*
(…) *tuṟaikkellāṅ katūramākum*
kaṉalāṉa tiṟavukō lākumpāru
vaṇṇamāñ carakkukaḷtāṉ kaṭṭippōkum
(…) *aṟupattu ṉāluñcākum*
(…) *kalluppu itilē cākum*
taṉatāṉa navaccāraṅ kaṭṭippōmē (CuṇKāṇ 27)
kaṭṭiyē vīramatu maṇipōlāṭum
kaṭitāṉa pūramatu cuṇṇamākum
(…) *nalamākat tātuvellāñ cuṇṇamākum*
(…) *kuṇamāka cakalamuntāṉ cittiyāmē* (CuṇKāṇ 28)

perfecting operations (*saṃskāra*) performed on mercury[37], described in the Sanskrit texts, do not appear in the Tamil siddha alchemical literature that I have consulted, the similarities between the concepts of killing and binding in the two alchemical traditions suggests certain influences between them, which are yet to be explored.

As shown in the selected passages that I have presented above, the discourse on binding and killing in the Tamil siddha alchemical texts presents the cruel substances as agentive and powerful. For example, *cavukkāram*, which is an important representative of such materials, is imaged as a substance endowed with extraordinary transformative qualities that enable the performance of alchemy and achievement of the alchemical goals. Furthermore, Yākōpu in his text worships the substance alongside God (Allah) and the prophet Muhammad (CuṇKāṇ 380):

> Worship and praise Allah, entirely worship and praise the salt [i.e., *cavukkāram*]! As in lamentation, raise [your] voice! Worship and praise Muhammad, having fallen to his feet! Without hiding, prostrate and worship *cavukkāram* in a proper way![38]

The above quoted passage suggests that the material is divinized, and its powers are comparable to the divine creative potency. Similar comparison occurs also in another verse, referring to the production of the

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[37] For the description of all the alchemical *samskāra*s in the Sanskrit alchemical literature, see e.g., White 1996: 265–269. Contemporary attempts to reconstruct perfecting alchemical operations described in the Sanskrit alchemical text have been documented and published on the YouTube channel of the Ayuryog project, led by Dagmar Wujastyk. See the Ayuryog YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4ssviEb_KoAtb2U_XaXf_w?app=desktop&ucbcb=1; on the Ayuryog project, see the website: http://ayuryog.org.

[38] (…) *allāvait toḻutupōṟṟit*
tuppaṛavā yuppaittāṉ toḻutupōṟṟi
aḻukiṛatu pōlaḻutu pulampiyēṟṟi
aṭipaṇintu makamatuvait toḻutupōṟṟi
naḻuviyē pōkāmāl cavukkārattai
nāṭiyē toḻutiṛaiñci naṉmaiyāka (CuṇKāṇ 380)

calcined preparation of blue vitriol (*turucu vaippu*), which is further used for binding mercury. Certain ingredients for the preparation are identified with God and other religious figures:

> After heating, the salt became Śakti, excellent copper became Allah, dear, [it] became [Allah], curd became a prophet (*napi*), proper lemon juice became indeed (…) a person who is called "a priest" (*levai*). If [with the use of these substances] you turn into ashes this blue vitriol, mercury will be bound, and a mercurial pill we be created. All the supernatural powers will be contained in it.[39]

Such imaging of the material substances creates their picture as powerful and holy beings rather than inert, passive and insentient materials. The materials are therefore credited with a divine status and prestige, similarly to the honourable figures mentioned in the verses. The passage also reflects well religious hybridity of Yākōpu's text, as he identifies the substances not only with Muslim religious figures, but also with Hindu goddess Śakti. In a similar manner, Yākōpu describes another preparation, namely a powder of sulphur and blue vitriol (*turucukentic cuṇṇam*):

> To what is this powder comparable? It resembles Allah who is the refuge. (…) Everything happened by its power. Look, [it is] equal to the four Vedas, which are precious to the world. From its touch, everything becomes calcined. This beautiful powder is very strong. If you are left without it, there will be no proper supernatural powers [for you], learn and see.[40]

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[39] *vāṭṭumē uppatuvuñ cattiyāccu*
vaḷamāṉa cempuatuvum allāvāccē (CuṇKāṇ 475)
āccappā tayiratuvum napimārāccu
aṭaivāṉa elumiccam paḷaccārtāṉum
(…) *levaiyeṉṟa pērumāccu*
pativāṉa yitturucai nīṟṟiṇākkāl
(…) *racaṅkaṭṭuṅ kuḷikaiyākum*
nalamāka cakalacittu mitaṟkuḷḷākum (CuṇKāṇ 476)

[40] (…) *iccuṇṇam yētukkoppum*
pōkkāṉa allāvām poruntappāru

The material, which just by the touch turns other substances into calcined powders (*cuṇṇam*s), in other words: which kills them, is compared in the above quoted passage to the highest God. Such presentation of the substance suggests its extramundane potency in relation to other substances, which it may kill, similarly to the God who takes and gives life to the creatures. By comparison to the Vedic scriptures, the powder of sulphur and blue vitriol is presented as a treasure of special value. The verse ascribes to the substance causative properties, highlights its strength, and suggests that the material is the source of supernatural powers.

Concluding remarks

The discourse on binding and killing conveys an interesting notion that in the Tamil siddha tradition even non-human lifeless materials are credited with certain agency, for they are depicted as creative and destructive agents of the aforementioned alchemical actions. The substances, like *kuru*, *cavukkāram* and its preparations, etc., are depicted as active participants of the alchemical operations. It is evident in the quoted passages that the texts do not present inanimate matter merely as an inert background of human activities, but they rather credit the substances with their own agentive powers. This notion is reflected especially in the passages that concern the alchemical killing and binding. Not only an alchemist is presented as an agent of the alchemical operations, but also the substances are considered as important agentive entities, which are able to kill and bind other substances.

The references to violence and cruelty ascribed to the substances and compared, for example, to fierce animals or death personified,

(…) *ellāmu mitaṉālāccu*
nātariya nālvēta moppāmpāru
(…) *toṭṭatellāñ cuṇṇamākum*
vaṭivāṉa yiccuṇṇam vaḻuvāmetta
akalavē yitaiviṭṭu niṉṟāyāṉāl
aṭaivāṉa cittiyillai yaṟintupārē (CuṇKāṇ 61)

evoke the alertness, but also respect, in the recipient of the texts. Comparisons and identifications with various honourable figures, presented in the above quoted verses, anthropomorphize, or even divinize the materials, presenting them as sentient beings able to act and perform transformations on other materials and on human beings. The substances kill, but also bestow longevity and immortality, which implies that they possess God-like powers. Additionally, they are often depicted as entities endowed with certain character traits, such as fierceness and mercilessness, which blurs the boundary in the image of the human and inhuman realm in the Tamil siddha literature.

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Kṛpa
A Neglected Brahmin Warrior*

ABSTRACT: In a recent study (Pontillo 2016) it has been argued that the *Mahābhārata* contains traces of a heterodox culture, the Vrātya-culture, and these emerge most clearly in connection with Bhīṣma and Droṇa. In this article it will be strongly suggested that any analysis of these two epic characters should take Kṛpa into account as well, since he has many features in common with them, especially with Droṇa. Furthermore, after a briefly outlined proposal to explain these commonalities, the function of the narrative character of Kṛpa will be examined.

KEYWORDS: Kṛpa, Droṇa, *Mahābhārata*, violence

Introduction

Since the beginning of Indology, the *Mahābhārata* (= MBh),[1] one of the two great Indian epics, has attracted the attention of scholars and has become the subject of study from the most diverse perspectives. This

* My sincere thanks go to two anonymous reviewers for their thorough review and to the editors for their patience. I am solely responsible for any remaining errors.

1 All references are to the Critical Edition of the MBh (Sukthankar 1933–1972).

will certainly not change in view of its importance, the variety of motifs it contains, its complex history of origin and transmission, and its sheer size. Since this work is situated between Vedic culture and the world of Classical Hinduism of the Purāṇas, it is also a worthwhile object of research for studies on the continued influence of the former and on the origin of ideas prevailing in the latter. The complex history of ideas in this work can be seen in many points that are very often connected with the idea of *dharma*, and this also applies to the link between *varṇa* and violence. Thus, a number of characters that appear in the MBh belong to the *varṇa* of the Brahmins on the one hand, but are dedicated to the craft of war, on the other. This contradicts the norms of *dharma* and therefore requires an explanation, especially with regard to the extent of violence in the epic, where in many places it appears excessive.[2]

Tiziana Pontillo has made a suggestion for dealing with one aspect of this complex phenomenon; in a recent article, she has argued that the MBh contains traces of an Indo-Āryan but non-Brāhmaṇic culture termed Vrātya-culture which emerged from the first wave of Indo-Aryan immigrants and is distinct from that of communities adhering to Vedic beliefs and practices (Pontillo 2016). She has tried to establish the connection between this culture and the MBh by interpreting certain elements of the epic as traces of two features of the Vrātya-culture: "a) competitive access to social status; b) a sort of heroic asceticism aimed at god-like status" (Pontillo 2016: 210). In particular, Pontillo regards episodes and motifs connected to two of the most important heroes of the older generation, Bhīṣma and Droṇa, as unexplainable within the frame of a *dharma*-oriented society based on the *varṇāśrama*-system, but as rather easily comprehensible if taken as being part of an older competitive society.

It goes to Pontillo's credit that she has directed the attention to some noteworthy features of the MBh, feature which are without doubt in need of further attention, even if one may not be inclined

[2] Goldman has given an apt characterization of the MBh (Goldman 2021: 51): "There are probably few, if any, major works of world literature that even remotely approach the level of the Mahābhārata's obsession with this theme [= genocide, F. K.]."

to accept all conclusions she has drawn from them. As I have argued elsewhere, for example, a focus exclusively directed at Bhīṣma and Droṇa may tend to leave out other important aspects, as there is at least one more epic character, Kṛpa, who has a number of features in common with them and needs therefore to be taken into account as well (Köhler 2021: 106). A comparison with Kṛpa will be undertaken here, accordingly, and I proceed as follows: 1. It will be argued that the character of Kṛpa needs to be compared with that of Bhīṣma and Droṇa, and the similarities and differences between them will be listed and discussed. 2. In the second step, an attempt will be made to understand the character of Kṛpa within the frame of a narrative model according to Mangels (1994). The article will end with some concluding deliberations about his narrative role in the MBh.

An extraordinary career

Biography

> *aśvatthāmā balir vyāso hanūmāṃś ca vibhīṣaṇaḥ |*
> *kṛpaḥ paraśurāmaś ca saptaite cirajīvinaḥ ||*
>
> Aśvatthāman, Bali, Vyāsa, Hanumān and Vibhīṣaṇa, Kṛpa and Paraśurāma: These are the seven long-lived ones.

Among the seven "long-lived" beings enumerated in this anonymous stanza is Kṛpa, a character from the MBh. It is said there that he holds a prominent position in the court of the Kauravas and is involved in one of the most important episodes (the night massacre), but nevertheless, he has usually received little attention in the West. Not only has he been more or less completely neglected in research;[3] he does not even figure in Peter Brook's 1989 adaption of the epic for the theatre. And it is easy to see why: No *parvan* is named after him, no unfair means is used to kill him (indeed, he is not killed at all, but rather

[3] The only exception known to me is Smith 1991.

belongs to the few survivors of the battle), there is no episode within the epic that is focused exclusively on his actions, and the story of his supernatural birth resembles that of Droṇa (which, however, is told in much more detail) so closely, that it is indeed difficult to make sense of his appearance in the text at all, be it from religious, text-historical, or narrative perspective. However, the statements made by and about him in the epic are not easily reconciled with this status. As the teacher of the Pāṇḍavas, the Kauravas and later on even of Parikṣit, he is treated with respect throughout; furthermore, he sees himself as an invincible fighter.[4] To come to terms with this somewhat confusing state of affairs, it may be helpful to start with the most decisive parts of his biography. Its earlier stage, until the start of his time as a teacher, is recounted by Vaiśaṃpāyana to Janamejaya in MBh 1.120 in 21 *śloka*s. Previously, it was reported that the Rudras have incarnated in Kṛpa (MBh 1.61.71). He is a Brahmin, son of Śaradvat and grandson of the Rishi Gautama.[5] He was born, together with his twin sister Kṛpī, by way of the spilling of seed on a bundle of reeds by his father at the sight of an *apsaras*. The twins were brought to the court by the king Śaṃtanu and raised there. After their father had tracked them down, he instructed Kṛpa in martial arts. Afterwards Kṛpa himself became the teacher of the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas instructing them in the use of arms.

Apart from this chapter, he is prominently featured in two episodes:[6] the first one is situated immediately before the beginning of the battle, where Yudhiṣṭhira approaches the elders on the enemy's side (Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Kṛpa and Śalya) to receive their permission to fight them (MBh 6.41). The second time Kṛpa appears is in the

4 *avadhya*, MBh 6.41.69, cf. footnote 22.

5 Which Gautama? MacDonnelll and Keith have listed several persons of this name from Vedic texts, but not in connection with Kṛpa or his father Śaradvat (MacDonell and Keith 1958: 240–241). The name "Kṛpa" itself appears two times only in the Ṛgveda (RV 8.3.12 and 8.4.2), where it denotes a protegée of Indra (*ibid*.: 179). Therefore, unlike Droṇa, a clear Vedic genealogy cannot be easily reconstructed for Kṛpa.

6 The descriptions of Kṛpa's fights with various enemies in the battle of Kurukṣetra will not be considered here.

night massacre after the battle which forms the subject matter of the 11th book, the *Sauptika Parvan*, and is certainly one of the most gruesome episodes in the entire epic. Aśvatthāman seeks revenge on Dhṛṣṭadyumna, at any cost, for the death of his father Droṇa, even in violation of dharma rules (attacking the sleeping and defenceless, intemperance in killing). Kṛpa, together with Kṛtavarman agrees to help him in his bloody revenge, in spite of objections he has raised against it earlier (MBh 10.1–5; 8) and takes his leave of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his companions (MBh 11.10.18–23). For the last time, the MBh reports about Kṛpa in connection with the departure of the Pāṇḍavas; he is made the teacher of Parikṣit, the last surviving Pāṇḍava (MBh 17.1.13, as prophesized by Kṛṣṇa, MBh 10.16.13).

Comparison with Droṇa and Bhīṣma

In order to test the viability of assigning Bhīṣma and Droṇa to a presumed non-orthodox Vrātya culture on the basis of the figure of Kṛpa, it will be first investigated whether there are sufficient similarities between these three characters. The criteria used for this comparison can be understood as that subset of kinds of attributes that constitute the characters within the epic. They are listed in the following table:

	Kṛpa	**Droṇa**	**Bhīṣma**
Birth	supernatural	supernatural	usual[7]
Varṇa	Brahmin	Brahmin	kṣatriya
Aṃśa	Rudras	Bṛhaspati	Dyaus
Special characteristic	Master of martial arts	Master of martial arts	Master of martial arts
Motive for fighting for Duryodhana	wealth	wealth	wealth
After the battle	survived	dead	dying

[7] Compared to the births of Kṛpa and Droṇa, that of Bhīṣma certainly appears to have happened in a much more common way, since he was at least born of a woman, the goddess Gaṅgā.

Even a superficial comparison shows they are similar; all three belong to the older generation, are masters of martial arts and are considered by Vaiśaṃpāyana as partial incarnations (*aṃśa*) of divine beings (this in itself is nothing uncommon in the epic scheme of things), and, against their better judgment, all three fight for wealth on Duryodhana's side. The similarities between Kṛpa and Droṇa, in particular, are striking: Both of them are sons of Brahmins, both of them are the offspring born of semen spilled involuntarily at the sight of an *apsaras*,[8] and both engage in an activity that deviates from the norms of their caste. Furthermore, since Droṇa marries Kṛpī, the twin sister of Kṛpa, they are related to each other. In view of these commonalities, it makes sense not to limit the investigation of "conspicuous" characters from the fathers' generation to Droṇa and Bhīṣma, but also to extend it to Kṛpa. What significance do the results of this comparison have? Is it possible to understand the traits of Kṛpa's biography as remnants of an archaic culture based on competition and aiming at reaching a god-like status? The answer is likely to be rather negative. This becomes particularly clear when a closer look is taken at the differences between Kṛpa and Droṇa in particular. No aspects of competition or rivalry are mentioned in connection with Kṛpa, nor can any ambitions for divine status be ascribed to him. On the contrary, unlike Droṇa, who is reprimanded for his violation of class rules immediately before his death at the hands of Bhīma (MBh 7.165.28–31) and in the disputes among the Pāṇḍavas and their allies after his killing by Dhṛṣṭadyumna (MBh 7.168.22–39),[9]

[8] In Kṛpa's case, the seed fell on reed (*śara*); in Droṇa's, it was put by his father Bharadvāja into a bucket (*droṇa*), cf. MBh 1.120.12 and 1.121.4. Smith has already noted the parallels in the stories of their births and compares them to the story of the birth of Skanda, which is told in MBh 9.43, and who has been born without a mother as well (Smith 1991). According to Smith, these three stories are variations of the myth of a male hero or savior (Smith 1991: 98). But even if the motif of parthenogenetic (perhaps better "unisexual"?) birth may have a mythical background, the stories where it has been used are located in different narrative frames; the story of Skanda is told by Vaiśaṃpāyana to Janamejaya without a connection to the main plot.

[9] Cf. especially MBh 7.165.31 *ekasyārthe bahūn hatvā putrasyādharmavid yathā | svakarmasthān vikarmastho na vyapatrapase katham* "You kill many for a single

to my knowledge, no such accusation is ever made against Kṛpa. Not only that, he is even appointed Parikṣit's teacher although he was involved in the night massacre.[10] Kṛpa is thus firmly anchored in the society ruled by the norms of *varṇa* despite belonging to the older generation, and he is recognised as such.

Genesis and narrative function of Kṛpa in the MBh

Genesis of the character of Kṛpa

It has thus been shown that despite many similarities with the other two main representatives of the older generation, Bhīṣma and Droṇa, especially with the latter, Kṛpa represents an independent and at the same time strangely contradictory character. This naturally raises the question: How can this character, together with its peculiarities, be explained? How is it possible that someone who was involved in some of the worst violations of the Dharma norms, namely the killing of Abhimanyu and especially the nocturnal massacre, is not only not punished by the victors, but in the end is even entrusted with a most important task, the education of Parikṣit? I do not want to pretend to already have a ready answer to these questions, but instead outline a possible approach to a solution in the following. Until now, it has been tacitly assumed in this article that the MBh in the form of the Critical Edition must be understood as literature, and thus as a work of art in its own right, and that questions of textual transmission can be neglected in comparison. But with regard to the peculiar character of Kṛpa a closer look at the Critical Edition may offer an

son, like one who does not know the Dharma, leaving your own activities [you kill] those who follow their activities—are you not ashamed?"

[10] And Kṛpa has certainly not anticipated this development, rather, he is, like Kṛtavarman and Aśvatthāman, aware of the extent of their crime and fears its consequences, as he confesses to Gāndhārī and Dhṛtarāṣṭra: *pāṇḍūnāṃ kilbiṣaṃ kṛtvā saṃsthātuṃ notsahāmahe*—"After committing such an evil to the Pāṇḍus we cannot stay" (MBh 11.10.16ab).

explanation for its genesis. The chapter which contains the story of Kṛpa's miraculous birth starts with a question poised by Janamejaya (Buitenen 1973: 266): "Pray tell, great brahmin, what was the origin of Kṛpa and how did he come to be born from a reed stalk and obtain his weapons?"[11] But this question appears without any connection to the content of the preceding chapter 119 and is also not foreseeable in the immediately preceding chapters either.[12] Chapter 119 is mainly about the rivalry between the young Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas and especially about Duryodhana's assaults on Bhīma. There the last stanza reads (*ibid*.: 265):

> The sons of Pāṇḍu, tamers of their foes, divined it all, but following Vidura's advice, did not bring it into the open.[13]

There is an obvious narrative break between these chapters, and for this reason van Buitenen has inserted in brackets the translation of one stanza that has been excluded by Sukthankar from the text of the Critical Edition (*ibid*.: 265):[14]

> (Then, seeing that the boys at play were getting too malicious, the king entrusted them to Gautama, so that they would be taught by a guru– Gautama Kṛpa, master of the precepts of the Veda, who had been born from a reed stalk).[15]

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[11] MBh 1.120.1: *kṛpasyāpi mahābrahman saṃbhavaṃ vaktum arhasi śarastambhāt kathaṃ jajñe kathaṃ cāstrāṇy avāptavān*.

[12] Although Kṛpa's birth was already mentioned in MBh 1.57.90, as was pointed out by one of the reviewers, where it appears as one of the elements of the long list of the epic's main characters, the details of his biography are only narrated in MBh 1.120.

[13] MBh 1.119.43: *pāṇḍavāś cāpi tat sarvaṃ pratyajānann ariṃdamāḥ udbhāvanam akurvanto vidurasya mate sthitāḥ*.

[14] As he aptly notes (*ibid*.: 459), without this stanza chapter 120 would not be needed.

[15] *kumārān krīḍamānāṃs tān dṛṣṭvā rājātidurmadān guruṃ śikṣārtham anviṣya gautamaṃ tān nyavedayat śarastambe samudbhūtaṃ vedaśāstrārthapāragam* (Sukthankar 1933: 534). This stanza is contained in manuscripts K4, Dn and D2,4; all of them belong to the northern recension and have been considered by

In addition, there are other conspicuous features: The description of Kṛpa's biography ends with a stanza of 6 times 8 syllables (MBh 1.120.21):

> *tato 'dhijagmuḥ sarve te dhanurvedaṃ mahārathāḥ*
> *dhṛtarāṣṭrātmajāś caiva pāṇḍavāś ca mahābalāḥ*
> *vṛṣṇayaś ca nṛpāś cānye nānādeśasamāgatāḥ*
>
> […] and from him all the warlike sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and the powerful Pāṇḍavas learned archery; and so did the Vṛṣṇis and other barons who came from different countries. (transl. Buitenen 1973: 266)

Almost at the end of the (much longer) biographical account of Droṇa, there is a stanza that is quite similar both in content and metre (MBh 1.122.46):

> *rājaputrās tathaivānye sametya bharatarṣabha*
> *abhijagmus tato droṇam astrārthe dvijasattamam*
> *vṛṣṇayaś cāndhakāś caiva nānādeśyāś ca pārthivāḥ*
>
> Other princes also gathered there, bull of the Bhāratas, and came to the eminent brahmin Droṇa to learn about weapons, such as the Vṛṣṇis and the Andhakas, and also barons who hailed from other countries. (transl. Buitenen 1973: 270)

The introduction to Droṇa's biography also seems strange in view of the fact, that Kṛpa, an excellent archer, had already worked as a teacher. The stanza reads as follows (MBh 1.121.1):

> *vaiśaṃpāyana uvāca*
> *viśeṣārthī tato bhīṣmaḥ pautrāṇāṃ vinayepsayā*
> *iṣvastrajñān paryapṛcchad ācāryān vīryasaṃmatān*

Sukthankar as being of inferior quality (*ibid*.: LI, LXVI and LXXI). Some manuscripts also add *adhijagmuśca kuravo dhanurvedaṃ kṛpāt te* (*ibid*.).

> Vaiśaṃpāyana said: Looking for excellence and demanding discipline for his grandsons, Bhīṣma asked about for teachers of recognized prowess who knew archery […]. (transl. Buitenen 1973: 267)

So, on the one hand, some features of Kṛpa's character have been elaborated in a slightly more pronounced manner in only a few manuscript traditions, but on the other hand, he appears in all of them; it seems therefore most likely that its conception must go back in time beyond the first common archetype. The easiest way to account for this state of affairs is the assumption that Kṛpa, a character similar to Droṇa, was attached to one or even some multiple versions of the MBh story and has been integrated into the written forms of this epic. But it goes without saying that this assumption is in need of further research.

The narrative function of Kṛpa

For the understanding of Kṛpa's character in the MBh it is not sufficient, of course, to seek explanations for its origin; these must rather be supplemented by considerations of its function within the epic. Such an approach, however, requires consideration of the textual form, and this question is notoriously difficult due to the MBh's complicated history of transmission. On the one hand, it is widely recognized in research that the MBh in its present form is the product of additions and revisions; on the other hand, it has been received as a unit, i.e. a discrete literary work. And if this is the case, the following two assumptions will be presupposed: the MBh (1) displays an elaborate arrangement of textual parts into a structured unit, and (2) this structure can be heuristically considered as intentionally formed. In order to do justice to them, the communication model taken from literary theory will be presented below and applied to Kṛpa's narrative function.[16]

[16] The following explanation is a summary of Köhler 2015: 133–136 and is essentially based on Mangels 1994: 29–35 and 44–59.

Excursus: The communicative model of literature

The starting point is the assumption that literary works can be understood as acts of communication for which sender, addressee, and message are necessary. This model becomes complicated by the postulate that there are several communicative levels within a text. One has therefore to distinguish between the concrete author, the implied author and the fictitious narrator, who all have their receptive counterpart (the concrete, the implied and the fictitious reader). Furthermore, there are also the protagonists whose stories are told; they are the narrated characters. The concrete author is the person who is responsible for bringing the literary work into existence, and the concrete reader is the one who perceives it. The implied author is the imaginary authorial presence discerned throughout the text; such an authorial presence may be detected especially in the way the story is depicted; this author is recognizable in the MBh, for example, by the *bhakti* elements as well as the final stanzas at the end (MBh 18.31–54). His counterpart, the implied reader, is in a way a hybrid entity: on the one hand he constitutes the ideal audience the author wants to address, on the other he figures as an ideal which the concrete readers should resemble in their interpretative acts. The fictitious narrator and his audience, finally, are inhabitants of the imaginary work created by the (concrete) author. In the case of the MBh, Ugraśravas and Vaiśaṃpāyana, as well as Saṃjaya, are the fictitious narrators.

With the help of this model, we will now take a closer look at the narrated character of Kṛpa, especially its resemblance to that of Droṇa. At a certain point in time, the MBh included both of them, and since it is an epic, consequently a work of literature, the question of the literary function of this character necessarily arises. This question can be further clarified, since epics belong to narrative literature: what is the narrative function of Kṛpa in the MBh? As we have seen, there are only a few passages where he is prominently featured, and one of them is embedded in descriptions of Yudhiṣṭhira's visits to his gurus in the midst of the hostile army immediately before the battle to receive their permission to fight them (MBh 6.41.32–83). In the following,

we will argue that the reason for Kṛpa's ambivalent position can be found in this scene. Yudhiṣṭhira visits Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Kṛpa in turn, and it is very revealing what he wishes to learn from his teachers; a means to defeat them in battle.[17] First Yudhiṣṭhira questions Bhīṣma (MBh 6.41.40–43):

> Yudhiṣṭhira said: "How will I be able to defeat you, the invincible, in battle; recommend a benefit to me, if you see [my] welfare!"
>
> Bhīṣma said: "Kaunteya, I do not see any man who could defeat me in battle as long as I am fighting, even if it were Śatakratu [Indra] in person."
>
> Yudhiṣṭhira said: "Well, therefore I ask you, Grandfather, praise be to you! Pray tell [me] the means for victory over you in the battle with the enemies!"
>
> Bhīṣma said: "Son, I do not see an enemy who could defeat me in battle. The time of my death is not yet there; come back [again]!"[18]

Bhīṣma's replies are not particularly helpful, as he puts him off until a later date.[19] Next in turn is Droṇa (MBh 6.41.56–61):

> Yudhiṣṭhira said: "I ask you, best of the twice-born, listen to what I wish to be told. How will I be able to defeat you, the invincible, in battle."

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17 In what follows Yudhiṣṭhira's meeting with Śalya will be omitted, since the subject of their talk is slightly different from that of the other ones.

18 MBh 6.41.40–43: *yudhiṣṭhira uvāca kathaṃ jayeyaṃ saṃgrāme bhavantam aparājitam | etan me mantraya hitaṃ yadi śreyaḥ prapaśyasi || bhīṣma uvāca na taṃ paśyāmi kaunteya yo māṃ yudhyantam āhave | vijayeta pumān kaś cid api sākṣāc chatakratuḥ || yudhiṣṭhira uvāca hanta pṛcchāmi tasmāt tvāṃ pitāmaha namo 'stu te | jayopāyaṃ bravīhi tvam ātmanaḥ samare paraiḥ || bhīṣma uvāca na śatruṃ tāta paśyāmi samare yo jayeta mām | na tāvan mṛtyukālo me punarāgamanaṃ kuru ||*

19 At MBh 6.103.70–82 Bhīṣma tells Yudhiṣṭhira about the possibility of employing Śikhaṇḍin for his killing; for Bhīṣma's role in the epic and especially his moral authority based on his embodiment of the virtues which Kṛṣṇa proclaims to Arjuna, cf. McGrath 2018.

> Droṇa said: "Your victory does not happen as long as I fight in the battle. Strive swiftly for my death together with your brothers, king!"
>
> Yudhiṣṭhira said: "Well, therefore tell [me] the means for your death, big-armed one: Bowing reverently here I ask you, teacher, praise to you."
>
> Droṇa said: "I see no enemy, son, who could kill me while I stand fighting on the battlefield, unceasingly showering floods of arrows full of fury,
>
> King, one can kill me in the fight of the warriors, if I, approaching death, have laid down my weapons and am unaware. This I tell you truly.
>
> I will abandon the weapon after I have heard something exceedingly terrible from a man whose speech is trustworthy. This I tell you truly."[20]

Here, too, the *guru*'s replies are not exactly uplifting: While Droṇa hints at how he might be defeated, it is becoming apparent that this will involve a violation of *dharma*, since killing a man who has laid down his weapons violates the rules of war, and this can only be disastrous in Yudhiṣṭhira's eyes. With this certainly disappointing (to say the least) information Yudhiṣṭhira finally approaches Kṛpa (MBh 6.41.68–70):

> Yudhiṣṭhira said: "Well, therefore I ask you teacher, listen to my speech!"

But at this point, the dialogue stops and Samjaya continues, as Yudhiṣṭhira is unable to continue:

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[20] MBh 6.41.56–61: *yudhiṣṭhira uvāca pṛcchāmi tvāṃ dvijaśreṣṭha śṛṇu me yad vivakṣitam | kathaṃ jayeyaṃ saṃgrāme bhavantam aparājitam || droṇa uvāca na te 'sti vijayas tāvad yāvad yudhyāmy ahaṃ raṇe | mamāśu nidhane rājan yatasva saha sodaraiḥ || yudhiṣṭhira uvāca hanta tasmān mahābāho vadhopāyaṃ vadātmanaḥ | ācārya praṇipatyaiṣa pṛcchāmi tvāṃ namo 'stu te || droṇa uvāca na śatruṃ tāta paśyāmi yo māṃ hanyād raṇe sthitam | yudhyamānaṃ susaṃrabdhaṃ śaravarṣaughavarṣiṇam || ṛte prāyagataṃ rājan nyastaśastram acetanam | hanyān māṃ yudhi yodhānāṃ satyam etad bravīmi te || śastraṃ cāhaṃ raṇe jahyāṃ śrutvā sumahad apriyam | śraddheyavākyāt puruṣād etat satyaṃ bravīmi te ||*

> Saṃjaya said: "After this speech the king staggered, lost his wit and did not speak. Gautama, knowing what he wished to say, replied to him: "King, I am invincible; fight, obtain the victory! I am pleased with your coming, I will always rise and pray for your victory, king. This I tell you truly."[21]

At first glance, Yudhiṣṭhira's collapse seems quite understandable; after all, he must assume that the imminent battle is already lost. From a dharmic perspective, however, the situation is somewhat different: On the one hand, as a Kṣatriya, he is obliged to join the battle in order to assert his interests and to gain fame and glory; on the other hand, Yudhiṣṭhira sees the horror of war in all its clarity and for this reason has tried to avoid it to the best of his ability.[22] Under these circumstances, when he learns that the whole battle and all its consequences are futile from his point of view (which goes beyond the *kṣatriyadharma*), his reaction cannot be surprising.[23] Less comprehensible from the point of view of narrative logic is Kṛpa's statement. After all, the two greatest heroes of the Kauravas, Bhīṣma and Droṇa, have not completely excluded that they could be defeated under certain circumstances, but this possibility is ruled out by Kṛpa.[24]

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[21] MBh 6.41.68–70: *yudhiṣṭhira uvāca hanta pṛcchāmi te tasmād ācārya śṛṇu me vacaḥ | saṃjaya uvāca ity uktvā vyathito rājā novāca gatacetanaḥ | taṃ gautamaḥ pratyuvāca vijñāyāsya vivakṣitam | avadhyo 'haṃ mahīpāla yudhyasva jayam āpnuhi || prītas tv abhigamenāhaṃ jayaṃ tava narādhipa | āśāsiṣye sadotthāya satyam etad bravīmi te ||*

[22] One may think of his offer to Saṃjaya immediately before the war (MBh 5.31) to be content with five villages!

[23] It has been proposed in a recent study (Marcinkowska-Rosół and Sellmer 2023: 423) that Yudhiṣṭhira's collapse results from the compulsion to fight his teachers (this would be quite comparable to Arjuna's scruples immediately before the battle, as described at the beginning of the *Bhagavadgītā*). This cannot be ruled out, but in this interpretation the content and context of the scene lose their relevance; Yudhiṣṭhira has known for some time that he has to fight his teachers, so he should have already grieved over it; but that his fight is hopeless according to human judgement may have only just become clear to him through the encounter with his teachers.

[24] Both von Simson (1969: 173) and subsequently Viethsen (2008: 34–36) saw in the above-mentioned chapter MBh 6.41 as the product of a "second interpolation,"

However, this does not fit in with the (narratively speaking) rather subordinate position he occupies compared to them. However, this statement seems to make more sense if the model of narrative levels presented above is used. At the outermost narrative level, that of the implied author, Kṛpa's statement gains a special significance. Researchers are almost unanimous in assuming a brahmanic authorship of the written versions of the MBh on which the Critical Edition is based (Bronkhorst 2007: 94), which, despite all uncertainties, is probably to be located in the centuries after the Maurya dynasty (> 180 BC, cf. Brockington 1998: 130–158, Simson 2011: 646–649). The Brahmin writers or editors saw their culture exposed to a variety of threats and wanted to counter these primarily with the model of cooperation between Kṣatriyas and Brahmins.[25] These ideas are most evident at the level of the implied author, as it is here that the authors' norms and values manifest themselves. In the picture sketched at this level, Kṛpa functions as a representative of Brahmanic culture and as such must be adopted into the world of the victorious Pāṇḍavas. Although Yudhiṣṭhira in particular is seen as the embodiment of the *dharma* associated with the Brahmanic worldview, *dharma* includes the esteem of its keepers, the Brahmins, and this esteem is shown at the narrative level of the main plot in the constellation of characters; Kṛpa as Brahmin remains without blame and even becomes Parikṣit's weapons instructor.[26]

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with which the insincere behaviour of the Pāṇḍavas is justified by the fact that the superior opponents themselves had given hints on how to overcome them. Kṛpa's character is, so to speak, left out of this interpretation, but it is shown below how he also finds his place in it.

[25] Of course, this cooperation does not run smoothly, and for this reason the Brahmin authors have not missed to introduce the considerable number of Brahmin warriors into the MBh to remind the *kṣatriya*s of it (cf. Feller 2015).

[26] Why are the other two Brahmins, Droṇa and Aśvatthāman, not "spared" and been given a place in the post-war society as well? These questions certainly require their own investigation, but one might suspect that Droṇa's death was too firmly anchored in the MBh's story from a certain point in time onwards, and that Aśvatthāman, who does not die but is cursed, deviates too much from Brahmanical norms (as he himself admits, cf. MBh 10.5.18–22).

Kṛpa's behaviour during the nocturnal massacre can perhaps also be rationalised by his function as a representative of Brahmanic culture and the special importance dharmic behaviour plays in it. At Duryodhana's request, Kṛpa anoints Aśvatthāman as leader (MBh 9.64.38–40). But in doing so, he subordinates himself to his instructions, so that despite all the reservations he expresses, he feels compelled to participate in Aśvatthāman's amoral actions.

In addition to confirming Brahmanical values and norms, the figure of Kṛpa also serves to emphasise Kṛṣṇa's divinity. Kṛpa not only survives the battle of Kurukṣetra, his position as Parikṣit's teacher in the art of weapons is predicted by Kṛṣṇa *vis-à-vis* Aśvatthāman (MBh 10.16.13):

> [Kṛṣṇa] "But Parikṣit, the hero, after attaining youth and undergoing the study of the Vedas, will obtain all weapons from Kṛpa Śāradvata."[27]

Aśvatthāman had assumed that the redirection of the Brahma weapon would result in the downfall of the Pāṇḍava lineage, but Kṛṣṇa not only averts this doom, by predicting that Kṛpa, Aśvatthāman's erstwhile comrade in arms, would be on the side of his mortal enemies, he even humiliates his adversary, for Kṛṣṇa's divine nature implies that his predictions will come true.

Conclusions

The analysis of Kṛpa's character presented here has started from Pontillo's considerations of two further epic actors, Bhīṣma and Droṇa, as embodiments of the continuation or afterlife of a heterodox culture, the "Vrātya" culture, in which social status is not assumed according to dharmically fixed norms for *varṇa*, but is acquired through competition and warriorship. Starting with the criticism that an examina-

[27] MBh 10.16.13: *vayaḥ prāpya parikṣit tu vedavratam avāpya ca | kṛpāc chāradvatād vīraḥ sarvāstrāṇy upalapsyate ||*

tion of the "teacher generation," to which Bhīṣma and Droṇa belong, is likely to be incomplete without a similar analysis of Kṛpa, who likewise belongs to it, the parallels between these three characters have been brought to the fore. Droṇa and Kṛpa in particular show a striking similarity in their essential characteristics, but without the elements of the heterodox "Vrātya" culture emerging in any significant way in the latter.

The conspicuous coincidence of these characteristics not only has consequences for the assignment of individual characters to heterodox forms of society, but also from a literary point of view, as such a doubling requires explanation from a narratological perspective. The problematic nature of Kṛpa's character is further exacerbated by the contradiction between two particularities: his involvement in the night massacre and his continued position of respect as Parikṣit's teacher. The solution suggested here is to consider the history of transmission: the MBh is known to have undergone various revisions, and it is against this background that Kṛpa's contradictory role can be understood: As a *dharma*-conscious Brahmin and warrior, he had to obey the instructions of the commander Aśvatthāman, and at the same time Kṛṣṇa's greatness is shown by the fact that he predicts the latter's future fate. Thus, both the importance of *dharma* and the glorification of Kṛṣṇa could be expressed.

It goes without saying that this proposal as well will not yield fully convincing answers. First of all, Kṛpa's narrative origin remains unclear. Although his function in the epic context can be made plausible, the obvious parallel to Droṇa cannot. And in view of the nocturnal massacre, the question arises as to whether Kṛpa is really the appropriate "vehicle" for *dharma* and Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*. Perhaps not only the figure of Kṛpa, but also his survival after a nefarious deed was an integral part of the epic tradition, so that they had to be retained even in revisions?

And finally, given the nature of Kṛpa, the question of the relationship between violence and *dharma* also arises. Although the authors of the MBh did not fail to problematise the use of violence (e.g. by emphasising benevolence, *ānṛśaṃsya* cf. Hiltebeitel 2002: 202–209),

Brahmins often remain unaffected by this, including Kṛpa. Or do they? A cursing of Kṛpa is not mentioned in the MBh, but to live as a teacher of Parikṣit in the worst age, the *kaliyuga*, is perhaps punishment enough according to the authors.

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Shattering the Crown of the God

Violence as a Formative and Legitimising Element in the Pāṇḍya Dynastic Narrative*

ABSTRACT: Among the extensive repertoire of Pāṇḍya dynastic themes, the motif of clash between a Pāṇḍya sovereign and Indra is ubiquitous. This *topos*, which supposedly originated around middle of the 5th century CE, can be traced to *Cilapattikāram* XI, 17–30, which celebrates a Pāṇḍya monarch wearing Indra's garland, capturing the clouds, and breaking the god's crown. The narrative was later employed in the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* (late 13th century) and its Sanskrit rendering, the *Hālāsyamāhātmya* (14th–15th centuries), where the actions of the Pāṇḍya kings were inserted in the narratives about the divine *līlā*s of Śiva in Madurai. Since the early phase of the dynasty, this mytheme was employed as a tool of political display in the South. After a survey of the motif in the first phase of the imperial documents, the paper will focus on the reemployment of the category of royal violence in the Teṅkāśi dynastic period (14th–18th centuries CE), using the lens of the official copper plates of the late Pāṇḍya chancery and the previous Sanskrit literary production.

KEYWORDS: Pāṇḍya dynasty, violence, Tamil literature, inscriptions, *mahākāvya*

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Introductory remarks: violent rulers

Aggressivity, or violence in general, is a feature inextricably linked to royal power and the general institution of kingship. To administrate and protect their domains, rulers were expected to take recourse to violence and war for the sake of the welfare of their subjects and their possessions. In most cases, violence exercised by kings exemplified itself in war or political clashes. Perhaps the Tamil war poetry, vehiculated by its poems celebrating the deeds of the rulers of the ancient Tamil region, embodies the character of violence and warfare defining the kingship better and in a greater measure than any other Indian literary genre.

Since the first historical and literary attestations of the Pāṇḍya (Tamil Pāṇṭiya) dynasty (6th–14th centuries CE; 14th–18th centuries CE), one of the most striking features delineating public presentation of the Tamil royalty is its highly aggressive and somewhat gory character. Certain samples of the Caṅkam production, especially those connected to the category of *puṟam* ("exterior"), falling under the nomenclature of "heroic poems,"[1] specifically underline this trend, exemplifying the relationship of the hero/ruler with the external world based mainly on war and heroic values. The above-mentioned characters are best described in the literary text considered the quintessence of the Tamil heroic poetry. The *Puṟanāṉūṟu*, generally dated between the 2nd and 5th centuries CE (Zvelebil 1974: 41–43), and considered the last component of the *Eṭṭuttokai* ("Eight Anthologies"), anthologised in its final form around the 12th–13th century CE, exemplifies the traits of the ancient Dravidian military ethos, with its poems dedicated to the rulers of the Cēra, Cōḻa, and Pāṇḍya realms. The literary representation of kings belonging to the latter indigenous dynasty mirrors the dynamics of the violent kingship, as this excerpt from a *Puṟanāṉūṟu* poem perfectly exemplifies:[2]

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1 For the "Tamil heroic poetry" the reader may consult the standard reference on the subject, Kailasapathy 1968.

2 As it is widely known, the representation of the aggressive and violent characters of the Dravidian kingship are omnipresent in the *puṟam* poems celebrating the three indigenous dynasties of the Tamiḻakam, and not a specific trend of the

naḷi kaṭal iruṅ kuṭṭattu
vaḷi puṭaitta kalam pōlak
kaḷiṟu ceṉṟu kaḷaṉ akaṟṟavum
kaḷaṉ akaṟṟiya viyal āṅkaṇ
oḷiṟu ilaiya eṯ̱ku ēnti
araicu paṭa amar uḻakki
urai cela muracu veḷavi
muṭit talai aṭup pākap
puṉal kuruti ulaik koḷīit
toṭittōḷ tuṭuppiṉ tuḻanta valciyiṉ
aṭukaḷam vēṭṭa aṭupōrc ceḻiya
āṉṟa kēḷvi aṭaṅkiya koḷkai
nāṉmaṟai mutalvar cuṟṟa māka
maṉṉar ēval ceyya maṉṉiya
vēḷvi muṟṟiya vāyvāḷ vēntē
nōṟṟōr maṉṟa niṉ pakaivar niṉṉoṭu
māṟṟār eṉṉum peyar peṟṟu
āṟṟār āyiṉum āṇṭuvāḻ vōrē || 26 ||

As a ship pushed by the wind on the dark depths of a large sea, the elephant came and opened up the battlefront. In the breach, holding a leaf-shaped javelin of shining tip, you have ploughed that field, slaying the enemy kings; you have caught their drums spreading your glory; you have made a fireplace with their crowned heads; you have put on fire a cauldron with blood instead of water. You have stirred it with your arm adorned with bracelets and, with that food, you, Ceḻiyaṉ of fierce war, have made a sacrifice on this field! King with the victorious sword who performed an ancient sacrifice while kings were attending you, together with Brahmins, Lords of the four Vedas, who obtained a restrained conduct and accomplished expertise! Your enemies have certainly acquired merits with ascetic practice to have become your enemies: despite being inferior to you, they will live in the afterlife!

Pāṇḍya royalty. Nevertheless, in the present paper, the attention is devoted exclusively to the primary material concerning the Madurai sovereigns. I quote the text of the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* according to Cāmināṭaiyar 1894; if not stated otherwise, all the translations in the present article are mine.

Violence and representations of bloodshed mirror at the literary level the ideological trends of the so-called "heroic style" of kingship, a definition that was first advanced decades ago by Burton Stein (1984: 3–11). According to the scholar's view, this primitive category was shaped through a precise tribal pattern of leadership and the heroic king's authority was generally recognized by the public as that of a violent battle champion, descending from an illustrious ancestry of warriors and selected for his victories during numerous military campaigns. Moreover, the heroic style of kingship was acknowledged within a limited geographical area confined to the royal family, and not shared within a hierarchic system of power division among sub-chieftains as in the later developments (Kaimal 1996: 34). The most striking feature of this leadership style was anyway the presence of primitive and rudimental forms of *dāna*, "the ritual giving"—an aspect constituting the ideological epicentre of Indian royal ideology which, in Tamil war poetry, assumed predominantly the shape of the sacrificial act (sometimes with Vedic connotations), as shown in the above-mentioned stanza from the *Puṟanāṉūṟu* glorifying the Pāṇḍya King, Talaiyālaṅkāṉattucceruveṉṟa Neṭuñceliyaṉ (210 CE).[3]

Even at the dawn of the ideological transition toward more elaborated kingship assets, which found their pivotal epicentre in more organised forms of purāṇic *dāna*,[4] the Pāṇḍya royal identity somehow

[3] Neṭuñceliyaṉ, "Victorious at Talaiyālaṅkāṉam," won as a very young man a battle against a Cēra and Cōḷa coalition at Talaiyālaṅkāṉam, a locality located in the Tanjavur district, near Tiruvālūr; the victory culminated in the Pāṇḍya primacy over the Tamil politics. This famous ruler, apart from being himself a poet, was the recipient of the extended *Maturaikkāñci*, a literary work belonging to the *Pattuppāṭṭu*; in the *Puṟanāṉūṟu*, 13 poems are dedicated to him (nos. 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26, 72 [authored], 76, 77, 78, 79, 371 and 372).

[4] These forms were mainly exemplified by the various aspects of building activities such as establishment of Brahmanical settlements (*brahmadeya*s), irrigation systems, and, more important, temple building, generally considered the most costly and prestigious form of *dāna*. As stated by Padma Kaimal, extending patronage and donating to temples were in fact the crucial mechanisms for generating and sustaining kings' sacred authority and contributed to create a lasting perspective of it (Kaimal 1996: 55).

preserved its "ancestral" and heroic traits. During the first centuries of the current era, some violent narratives characterising the Madurai royal centre started to appear; in time, these specific legends were further conceptualised into a coherent and organised repository of royal accounts which, in the course of centuries, became fundamental tools employed by the dynasty in its public display. Some of these motifs were persistently used in the Pāṇḍya official presentation, becoming the foundational components of the dynastic self-perception of the Madurai kingdom through the centuries.

The king and the god: The *Cilappatikāram* and the imperial records

Among this extensive royal material, the narrative that occupies the foremost place in the Pāṇḍya dynastic identity is represented by the violent story of an anonymous sovereign fighting against Indra and shattering the latter's crown. According to the core of this mytheme, because of the arrogant behaviour of the Tamil monarch who dared to sit on Indra's throne, heavy rains hit the city of Madurai. Responding to the situation, the king captured clouds that were destroying his capital thus provoking the wrath of the god. After a fierce fight, the Pāṇḍya lord defeated Indra and broke his crown with a disk, a magical weapon granted to him by Śiva.

The original frame of this motif is traceable to its oldest textual occurrence, fixed approximately during the 5th century CE. The origin of this myth, as in the case of the other narratives concerning the exploits of the Pāṇḍyas, is obscure and cannot be traced to any previous source. Its first attestation, presumably already coherent in contents and development, and juxtaposed with other narratives, appears at the opening of the second section of Iḷaṅkō Aṭikaḷ's *Cilappatikāram*, the earliest Tamil epic and the greatest among the so called *aimperuṅkāppiyaṅkaḷ* ("five major epics"). The *Cilappatikāram* narrates the story and peregrinations of a young couple, Kōvalaṉ and his wife Kaṇṇaki, the unjust execution of the former, accused of having stolen an anklet

(*cilampu*) of the Pāṇḍya queen, the furious madness of the latter who cuts off one of her breasts, the destruction of Madurai in a fire, and Kaṇṇaki's subsequent divine apotheosis as the goddess Pattiṉi, patron deity of marital fidelity. The subject matter is nevertheless related to a more ancient legend, which pre-existed in the indigenous Tamil tradition, and which is alluded to in some classical texts;[5] the poem is then considered a massive and progressive reworking of the original narratological nuclei of this story, which occupies foremost position in the Tamil literary and regional imagery. In the same way, even the actual form in which the *Cilappatikāram* has reached us does not represent its original version. In fact, as it has been long established by scholarship, the prologue to the *epos*, the epilogue, the closing sections of the three *kāṇṭam*s, and an introductory prose portion opening canto XXIX are widely considered to be later textual additions. As it is a posterior interpolation, the third book—*Vañcikkāṇṭam*, "The Book of Vañci"—was probably inserted to complete the ideological balance represented by the two previous sections of the poem (*Pukār* and *Maturaikkāṇṭam*s), which take place in the Cōḻa and Pāṇḍya lands.[6] Generally, given the stratified nature of the epic, the scholars tend to date the definitive asset of the poem towards the middle of the 5th century CE.[7]

At the beginning of the *Maturaikkāṇṭam* ("The Book of Maturai"), in the eleventh chapter, Kaṇṇaki and Kōvalaṉ, on their way to the Pāṇḍya capital, meet with an old bard, Māṅkāṭu, intent on singing the praises of the local sovereign. Hence, the singer's eulogy of the Madurai King, Āriyapaṭaikaṭanta Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ:[8]

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5 Zvelebil 1973: 173; as stated by the scholar, the original motif is hinted at in *Naṟṟiṇai* 216 and in an even more ancient composition, *Puṟanāṉūṟu* 278.

6 Pukār—or Kāvirippaṭṭiṇam (Zvelebil 1974: 132)—is considered the capital and fundamental seaport of the Cōḻa kingdom.

7 For the dating of the *Cilappatikāram*, and, more specifically, the debated "Gajabāhu Synchronism," the reader may refer to Zvelebil 1973: 174–175 and Nilakanta Sastri 1958: 112. Concerning the articulated problematic of the transmission of the poem, its characters and synopsis—which are beyond the scope of the present paper—please consult Zvelebil 1974: 131–135; Zvelebil 1973: 172–184.

8 I refer to the text of the *Cilappatikāram* according to Cāmināṭaiyar 1892.

vāḻka eṅkō maṉṉavar peruntakai
ūḻito ṟūḻito ṟulakaṅ kākka
aṭiyiṟ ṟaṉṉaḷa varacark kuṇartti
vaṭivēl eṟinta vāṉpakai poṟātu
pakṟuḷi yāṟṟuṭaṉ paṉmalai yaṭukkattuk
kumarik kōṭuṅ koṭuṅkaṭal koḷḷa
vaṭaticaik kaṅkaiyum imayamuṅ koṇṭu
teṉṟicai yāṇṭa teṉṉavaṉ vāḻi
tiṅkaṭ celvaṉ tirukkulam viḷaṅkac
ceṅkaṇā yirattōṉ tiṟalviḷaṅ kāram
poṅkoḷi mārpiṟ pūṇṭōṉ vāḻi
muṭivaḷai yuṭaittōṉ mutalvaṉ ceṉṉiyeṉṟu
iṭiyuṭaip perumaḻai yeytā tēkap
piḻaiyā viḷaiyuṭ peruvaḷañ curappa
maḻaipiṇit tāṇṭa maṉṉavaṉ vāḻkeṉat
tītutīr ciṟappiṉ teṉṉaṉai vāḻtti
māmutu maṟaiyōṉ vantirun tōṉai
yātu nummūr īṅkeṉ varaveṉak || XI, 17–30 ||

Long live our celebrated King and Ruler who protects the World through the eras! Long live the Teṉṉavaṉ[9] who rules the South and who conquered the Ganges in the north and the Himālaya! Since the beginning he made the enemy kings know his prowess, when the raging sea, against which he hurled his sharp javelin, not accepting such great enemy, took hold of the Pakṟuḷi river and also of the Kumari peak with its mountains. Long live the One who wears on his bright chest the shiny necklace of Indra of one thousand red eyes, so that the great lineage of the prosperous god of the Moon may shine! Once, when the broad thundering clouds passed by without stopping, complaining "He broke the armlet on the crown of Indra, the Supreme God!," he bound and subdued them, so that they could give great prosperity to the crops, without fault. May he long live!," thus a great Brahmin of ancient lineage, who arrived and stayed there, was saying, celebrating the Teṉṉaṉ of faultless excellency.

[9] Teṉṉavaṉ, "Lord of the South" (literally "man of the South"), is a typical epithet referring to the Pāṇḍya rulers from an early age.

According to this passage from the *Cilappatikāram*, the Southern ruler is portrayed as a majestic sovereign, who annexed the Ganges area and the Himālaya mountain range to his domain and to defend his land from natural disaster, hurled his javelin into the raging sea, which had retaliated against the Pa̲kṟuḷi river and Kanyā.[10] The second part of the bard's eulogy refers to the act of seizing Indra's garland and the breaking of the god's crown. As the *epos* suggests, this episode is connected to a wider narration involving clouds destroying the Pāṇḍya capital and the subsequent fight between Indra and the Madurai sovereign.

The origins of these specific narratives are not known and, at the present state of research, it is not possible to trace any precedents in any Caṅkam sources; they appear in the *Cilappatikāram*—perhaps as proper creations of the *epos*—around the middle of the 5th century CE, in an approximately coherent aspect, or as if their narrative skeleton had been set out previously, perhaps in an unknown or unattested repository of royal legends concerning the Madurai kings. Another possibility that can be advanced here takes into account the "composite" nature of the epic poem and its different *strata* of adaptation and reworking. We may further venture to argue that this specific section of Māṅkāṭu's eulogy in the Tamil epic poem—a text which in its current aspect bears strong mark of a Cēra reworking of a previous narratological tradition—testifies to a considerable Pāṇḍya component, represented by this group of dynastic narratives that might be considered a textual record or a vestige of a much older Pāṇḍya royal tradition circulating in the South but which is not possible to trace to its origin at the present state of research. Provisionally, the celebration of Āriyapaṭaikaṭanta Neṭuñce̲li̲ya̲n̲, structured in the *Cilappatikāram* through a reference to these episodes, might contain traces of Pāṇḍya narratological nuclei, which were the result of an assimilation from unattested sources or of a progressive adaptation of previous literary

[10] This episode of the flood and the aggressive advancement of the sea against the Pāṇḍya land is connected also to the story of the foundation of the third Caṅkam Academy (*kaṭaiccaṅkam*), which took place after the Madurai lord saved his domain. The episode is hinted at in Nampi's *Tiruviḷaiyāṭa̲rpurāṇam* (XXI, 8–9), as observed in Wilden 2014: 223.

antecedents in the South that were obscured in time, or, perhaps, by the very same Cēra reworking of the poem.

The next occurrence of this dynastic *topos*, a symptomatic evidence of the relevance of this royal narrative and its on-going crystallisation into precise patterns, can be traced in a specimen from the epigraphical corpus dated to the "First Empire" (6–10th centuries CE), a few centuries after the *Cilappatikāram*.[11] The "smaller" Ciṉṉamaṉūr plates of King Varaguṇa I (approximately 768–811 CE), with dating lost but surely issued between the 8th–9th century CE, are represented by three plates excavated at the Perumāḷ temple at Ciṉṉamaṉūr, in Madurai district.[12] This document, composed partly in Sanskrit and partly in Tamil stanzas and prose, presents for the first 14 lines a genealogical exposition of the Pāṇḍya dynasty which frames the recording of the immediate scope of the grant. As even a preliminary reading shows, the formulas in which the relevant parts of the plates are composed are clearly congruent with the idiom of the *Cilappatikāram* eulogy. In lines 3–14, covering the second side of the first copper plate and the first side of the second, we read as follows:[13]

amṛtakiraṇaṉ-aṉvayattil ākaṇḍalaṉat aḷiva kala samaramukhatt asuragaṇantalaiy aḷiyac cilai kuṉittu vaṭa-varaiyatu valāra-cūḷikai maṇikkeṇṭaip-poṟi cūṭṭiyun teṉ-varai micaik-kumbhodbhavanatu tīn-tamiḻiṟ cevi kaḻuviyum harihayanatu hāram pūṇṭu marddhāsanam-āvaṉōṭ-ēṟiyuṅ

[11] For the chronological division of Pāṇḍya history I refer to the traditional periodisation into "early," "imperial" (first/second phases) and "later" periods advanced, since the beginning of research on the kingdom, by Nilakanta Sastri and Sethuraman (Nilakanta Sastri 1972; Sethuraman 1978, 1980). These chronological divisions were of course the products of the early 20th century historiography, and they do not reflect an actual division of the Pāṇḍya kingdom's history into such temporal arches. Despite this, all the scholarly works on the subject maintain such periodisation, which I have kept for the sake of clarity and uniformity.

[12] Term "smaller" Ciṉṉamaṉūr plates highlights distinction of the said plates from another copper record recovered in the same locality in the Madurai district, the "larger" Ciṉṉamaṉūr plates issued during the 16th regnal year of the last monarch of the first imperial phase, Māṟavarman Rājasiṃha II (900–920 CE).

[13] I refer to the Tamil text of the smaller Ciṉṉamaṉūr plates according to *Pāṇṭiyar ceppēṭukal pattu* (pp. 75–77); the translation is from Krishnan 2002: 26–27.

curi-vaḷaiy-avaṉ- ṟiru-muṭi-micait-tūṇi pala paṭat tōḷ-ēcciyum ōtam-īḷa vēl-eṟintum ōr-āyiraṅ kratuc-ceytum bhūtagaṇam paṇiy-āṇaṭum bhuvanatalam potu nīkkiyum yāṉaiy-āyiram-aiyam-iṭṭum aparimitam-atiśayaṅkaḷ ceytu ūṉam-il pukaḻ-pāṇḍyavaṃśatt-ulōkanāthar palar kaḻintapiṉ [|; ll. 3–14]

After a number of kings of the Pāṇḍya family of spotless fame (born) in the race of the Moon—who bent their bow to cut off heads of crowds of *Asura*s on the battle front to prevent the destruction of Ākhaṇḍala (i.e., Indra); who mounted the emblem of the beautiful carp on the adamantine crest of the Northern mountain (i.e., the Himalayas); who bathed their ears with the sweet Tamil of Kumbhodbhava (i.e., Agastya residing) on the Southern Mountain (i.e., the Podiyil hills); who wore the necklace of Harihaya (i.e., Indra) and sat with him on one-half of his throne; who raised their arms breaking into pieces the ring around his sacred crown…(ll. 3–14)

This genealogical passage from the Ciṉṉamaṉūr plates, the first instance of this narrative in the whole Pāṇḍya epigraphical corpus,[14] seems to be clearly based on the imagery of the *Cilappatikāram* eulogy, where the episode of the fight between the Madurai king and Indra occurred, with the identity of the king being attributed to the ruler Neṭuñceḻiyan. The insertion of this motif into an official imperial document testifies to the relevance and importance of this narrative for the Pāṇḍya public identity and its presentation. In underlying this dynastic repertoire, the genealogical *praśasti* introducing the Ciṉṉamaṉūr plates (and other imperial records as well) projected a clear and undoubted claim of descent of the imperial Pāṇḍyas from anonymous ancestors who faced down and defeated Indra, destroying his crown, the symbol of his sovereignty.

[14] The mytheme of the ruler fighting will be omnipresent also in the later epigraphical production; for instance, ll. 87–88 from the Tamil eulogy framing the Taḷavāypuram plates, issued during the reign of King Parāntaka Vīranārāyaṇa (880–900 CE): *harihayaṇat āram pūṇṭum avaṇ muṭiyoṭu vaḷai uṭaittum*, "[the Pāṇḍyas] wore the garland of Harihaya and broke his crown and ring."

Given the approximate chronological vicinity of these pieces of evidence, it might be tempting to try to establish direct connection between the occurrence of this legend as it appears in the Tamil epic and the smaller Ciṉṉamaṉūr charter, which, presumably, inherited this account from the *Cilappatikāram* eulogy. As we have stated, this mythical account is centered on the fight between a Pāṇḍya sovereign and the god Indra, which culminates with the destruction of the divine crown. Additionally, the story, which appeared in the Tamil epic, is one of the most often recurring in the royal repository of the Madurai ideology and its origin seems uncertain, given that in the *Cilappatikāram* it appears already formed, or at least coherent in its pattern. Perhaps the aspect in which it appears in the epic and later in the early epigraphical corpus may have been the result of a reworking of an earlier non-extant Pāṇḍya narratological repository, or supposedly and conjecturally, it may have been based upon non-indigenous sources and adapted subsequently. In this sense, the narrative of the clash between the king and Indra may bear interesting similarities to the well-known episode of the fight between Kṛṣṇa and the god narrated in the *Viṣṇuparvan* of the *Harivaṃśa* (II, 74). Additionally, the general motif of the clash with Indra is present elsewhere in the *itihāsa,* which shows several samples of a ruler or a hero fighting with the lord of the gods. One interesting instance is represented by a not very recurrent myth of Agastya, namely the story of the twelve-years-long sacrifice (*Mahābhārata* XIV, 92). The sage was engaged in the performance of this particular ritual, and Indra, scared of the *ṛṣi*'s ascetic power, stopped the rains over the region to hinder the sacrifice. Agastya then threatened the god, declaring that he is going to become a new Indra (*upendra*); the god reconsidered his stand and once again sent beneficial rains to the land.[15] The frame of a struggle with the god in this Agastya legend may seem relevant, considering the recurrence of other myths of the sage in the epigraphical corpus and their importance in the Madurai

[15] More specifically, the story of Agastya's sacrifice and the "fight" with Indra shows similarities with another Pāṇḍya legend, encountered already in the eulogy of the *Cilappatikāram,* of the Madurai ruler who had captured clouds which had refused to rain on the land.

repository.[16] In fact, the *ṛṣi* is traditionally considered the *rājaguru* of the Pāṇḍya rulers and the tutelary figure of Tamil grammar. Nevertheless, even admitting the plausible influence of the twelve-years-long sacrifice narrative over the Pāṇḍya story of the king against Indra, this legend does not involve a real fight with the god, nor does it justify the other two accessory segments, namely the obtaining of the garland and staking claim to half of the heavenly throne. On the other hand, other mythical narratives that figure in the *Mahābhārata* present several common points with this royal Pāṇḍya legend and its articulation. Firstly, the story narrated in the Sanskrit epic about the fight of Skanda-Kārttikeya and his victory over Indra (III, 216): after the struggle with the lord of the gods, Śiva's son obtains from his opponent the golden garland made by Viśvakarmā and two of Indra's weapons, a *vajra* and a club. Furthermore, in an earlier passage from the same *Mahābhārata* (III, 214), Skanda pierces the Mount Krauñca with arrows.[17] Some of

[16] The Vēḷvikuṭi copper plates clearly hinted to Agastya and his deed in its Sanskrit genealogical portion. Stanza 3 makes allusion to some episodes connected to the sage's career, the stopping of the Vindhya mountains' growth and the drinking of the ocean waters, all narratives which are echoing the influence of *itihāsa*s (or epic in general). The story of Agastya and the Vindhya range is narrated in the third *parvan* of the *Mahābhārata* (III, 104); the mountains, being jealous of mount Meru which was due to be revolved around by the sun, asked the sun to do the same with them. At the sun's refusal, they grew to such a degree as to obstruct its path. Then the *devatā*s asked Agastya to intercede on their behalf and the sage requested the Vindhyas to bend over in order to facilitate his passage to the South, making them promise that they would keep such position until his return. Agreeing to the sage's proposal, the mountains bent, reducing their height; Agastya never returned from the southern lands and the Vindhya, not managing to outmatch Meru, were not able to resume their larger aspect. The second narrative, namely the *ṛṣi* drinking the ocean, is retold in the same *parvan* of the *itihāsa* (III, 103): after the clash between Indra and Vṛtra, the evil *asura*s hid in the ocean, threatening the gods and the Brahmins. Agastya, requested by the *deva*s to help them, drank all the waters, revealing the demons which took abode at the ocean's bottom and were finally defeated.

[17] *Mahābhārata* III, 214.31ab: *bibheda sa śaraiḥ śailaṃ krauñcaṃ himavataḥ sutam*. Another passage from the *itihāsa* (IX, 45.70–81) explicitly states that Skanda cleft the mountain not with arrows, but with a javelin given him by Agni (*śaktyā bibheda bhagavān kārttikeyo 'gnidattayā* (73cd). This narrative of the destruction of a mountain shows close similarities to an episode of the Pāṇḍya repository

these elements in the story of Kārttikeya bear significant similarities with the overall structure of the legend of the Madurai king and Indra. Another epic narrative which involves a fight with the lord of the gods and, additionally, the obtaining of Indra's throne, is represented by the famous episode of Arjuna's journey to *Indraloka*, the fight with the god (I, 229), the hero sitting himself on the divine throne (*Mahābhārata* III, 43.20) and Indra's gift of three mythical weapons.[18] All these epic narratives bear striking similarities with the general feature of the Pāṇḍya motif of the fight between the ruler and Indra. In my contention, these similarities are overly recurrent and of too great a relevance to be discharged as mere textual coincidences and we may here argue that the Madurai narrative could have been influenced by these stories taken from the *itihāsa* sources. If this conjecture were acceptable, we could assume that these epic narratives involving Agastya, Skanda and Arjuna may have had a significant influence in the development of this episode. This, then, may have resulted in the assimilation of specific characters of these *itihāsa* legends and their re-adaptation in the Pāṇḍya royal context, which attributed these exploits not to gods or epic heroes, but to the legendary Madurai rulers. The feature/motif of the Pāṇḍya narrative of the ruler fighting against Indra may be then the result of the influence of the epic narratives concerning Agastya, Arjuna and Skanda. The assimilation may be motivated by the apparent importance of these legendary figures for the Pāṇḍya ideology, especially considering the role played by Agastya and the recurrent mention of Arjuna in quite a few instances as far as the copper plates go.[19]

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which will be fixed many centuries later, around the late 13th century CE, in the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* by Perumpaṟṟapuliyūr Nampi, namely the *līlā* of the Pāṇḍya King Ugra who humbled Mount Meru with a club (story no. 61), similarly to Skanda on Mount Krauñca with arrows/javelin.

18 The granting of legendary weapons is already present in the story of Skanda and Indra; the same motif will figure also in the Pāṇḍya context, in the story from the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* about Ugra receiving weapons, a disk and a javelin, from his father, Śiva (story no. 12).

19 Similarly to Agastya's case, the Pāṇḍava hero is explicitly mentioned in the Vēḷvikuṭi charter's Sanskrit genealogical *praśasti* (stanza 12) and, among other royal legends, in the Tamil portion of the Taḷavāypuram grant of Parāntaka

However, it may be that the dynastic legend of the sovereign who destroyed Indra's crown became, by the first centuries of the current era, a fundamental trait of the Pāṇḍya royal identity. This aggressive myth, which seems omnipresent in the epigraphical corpus of both imperial phases of the Madurai kingdom, together with other legends,

Vīranārāyaṇa (ll. 86–102), and, lastly, in stanzas 6–7 of the Sanskrit eulogy of the "larger" Ciṉṉamaṉūr plates. A reference to the *Mahābhārata* context seems coherent if we take into account the more than attested presence of the Southern rulers in its narrative. The *itihāsa* refers to the Pāṇḍyas and their land more than once: at III, 85 and following, there is an *excursus* on the holy *tīrtha*s in the Pāṇḍya region, which include some localities connected to Agastya and the Kanyakumari area. A southern delegation attended Yudhiṣṭhira's royal consecration (II, 36/43), while, as is known, Pāṇḍya contingents joined the Pāṇḍava cause and fought at Kurukṣetra (V, 22). The *Mahābhārata* seems to consider them valiant soldiers, being inserted in Bhīṣma's military rating as *mahāratha*s, "great warriors on chariots" (V, 172). Additionally, a further reference to Arjuna in the imperial copper plates testifies not only to this intentional adaptation of epic material, but to the ideological "distortion" of deeds related to the Pāṇḍava hero and their application to Pāṇḍya rulers. The Tamil eulogy of the "larger" Ciṉṉamaṉūr (l, 85) relates the peculiar legend of the Pāṇḍya king who removed Arjuna's curse. According to the *Mahābhārata* narrative, the Pāṇḍava hero was cursed by the Vasus, the attendants of Indra, due to the treacherous death of their brother Bhīṣma in the Kurukṣetra war. Ulūpī, the Nāga Princess who married Arjuna during his twelve-years-long exile, sought her father Kauravya's help to remove danger from her husband. The Nāga king begged the river Gaṅgā, Bhīṣma's mother, to alleviate the curse, and the goddess predicted that Arjuna would be killed in a battle by his own son Babruvāhana, conceived with Princess Citrāṅgadā, and later would be brought back to life by Ulūpī with the aid of a magical gem. According to the epic (XIV, 79–80), the Nāginī provoked the meeting of Arjuna and his son Babruvahāna in Manipur, which resulted in the fight between father and son and, as the Gaṅgā foresaw, the consequent death of the hero. Ulūpī recovered then from the netherworld the magical gem and, placing it on the chest of the lifeless Pāṇḍava, restored him to life, removing in this way the curse of the Vasus. In the Ciṉṉamaṉūr dynastic celebration, it is stated that a Pāṇḍya ruler saved Arjuna from this curse; it is evident that the 10th century Madurai chancery operated a massive adaptation of this epic story, assigning fundamental role to one of the mythical rulers. This modification of the *itihāsa* narrative had beyond doubt the ideological function of placing the Pāṇḍya presence in the legendary pan-Indian past, emphasising once more the already attested presence of the rulers in the *Mahābhārata*.

constituted the foremost narrative through which the Pāṇḍyas not only perceived their past but presented their royal self-perception to be conveyed by their official chancery documents.

Moreover, this conception, perhaps inherited from the ancient traits of the Dravidian *puṟam* ethos or the reworking and adaptation of pan-Indian epic material, was not only an ideological product of the Madurai court. In the course of time, the theme of the Pāṇḍya ruler fighting against the god became an idiom through which the southern literature in Sanskrit, else rival political centres, referred to and perceived the Madurai monarchy and its ideological trends. For instance, in the literary frame of Veṅkaṭanātha's *Haṃsasandeśa*, at the closing of the first *āśvāsa*, we read how the hero Rāma, entrusting his love message for the imprisoned Sītā to his *dūta*, commands him to fly over the Pāṇḍya land; the Tamil region is described as follows:[20]

> *īśād astrāṇy* [em.; *astrād* ed.] *adhigatavatāṃ kṣatriyāṇāṃ prabhāvāt*
> *kārāvāsasmaraṇacakitais siktasasyān payodaiḥ* |
> *paśyan yāyāḥ param alakayā spardhamānair ajastraṃ*
> *puṇnyāvāsaiḥ purajanapadair maṇḍitān pāṇḍyadeśān* || 50 ||
>
> Travel on, looking at the Pāṇḍya land, which is adorned with cities, rural parts, and abodes of sanctity that constantly challenge the city of Alaka to excel it; [the land] that has its growing crops watered by rain clouds which tremble in fear at the memory of their imprisonment by the great power of the *kṣatriya*s who had obtained magical weapons from Śiva.

In this stanza, Veṅkaṭanātha provides thus a vague allusion to the background of the dynastic motif of fight between the Pāṇḍya king and Indra. This passage from the messenger poem hints, in fact, at the imprisonment of clouds, the narratological background that frames the clash, and some warrior kings (*kṣatriya*) who obtained weapons from Śiva; perhaps a subtle reference to the divine *cakra* (the weapon

[20] I refer to the original text of the *Haṃsasandeśa* according to Narayana Iyengar 1955.

used by the Madurai king to defeat Indra). Despite this hint found in the *dūtakāvya*, we may assume that the author referred specifically to the Pāṇḍya narrative about the fight between the Tamil monarch and the king of the gods. However, although in the *Haṃsasandeśa* the allusion is rather subtle, in other sources the references are far more explicit and easier to comprehend.

With the end of the first imperial phase of Madurai, culminating in the battle of Vellore around 925 CE, in which the Cōḻa King Parāntaka I (907–955) vanquished Māṟavarman Rājasiṃha II (900–920) and conquered the Pāṇḍya capital,[21] the Tanjavur kingdom extended its sway over the territorial area of the old empire. After a progressive weakening of the internal structure of the Cōḻa administrative machine, old scions of the Pāṇḍya imperial family gradually reacquired a hold over the region and, by the beginning of the 13th century CE, began a series of military campaigns against the Tanjavur overlords. According to Nilakanta Sastri, Māṟavarman Sundara I (1216–1239), the monarch who laid the basis for the advent of the "Second Empire," started to remove the yoke of the Cōḻa domination in the Pāṇḍya land, defeating Kulottuṅga III (1178–1218) and sacking the imperial cities of Tanjavur and Uṟaiyūr.[22] In order to further consecrate this decisive victory, Sundara performed the *vīrābhiṣeka* in the Cōḻa royal hall and the *tulābhāra* ceremony in Chidambaram, as testified to by his Tirupparaṅkuṟṟam record (ARE 1890, no. 49), issued in his

[21] The conflict between Parāntaka and Rājasiṃha escalated in three consecutive stages, which saw at first the Pāṇḍya sovereign being defeated by his opponent. After the first battle, Rājasiṃha sought help of the Ceylonese ruler Kassapa V (913–923 CE); however, the Sinhalese and Pāṇḍya conjoint forces were crushed by the Cōḻa army. Finally, Parāntaka annihilated his enemies in the battle of Vellore in 925, which provoked the flight of Rājasiṃha aided by Dappula IV (923–934) and the fall of Madurai (Nilakanta Sastri 1955: 122–123). These historical events are corroborated also by the *Mahāvaṃśa,* the Sinhalese chronicle (chapters 52–52; the interested reader may refer to Nilakanta Sastri 1955: 121,123 for the translation of the relevant passages).

[22] Nilakanta Sastri 1958: 193; Nilakanta Sastri 1972: 127; please refer also to Thinakaran 1987: 41–42.

seventh regnal year, and by his Tirunelvēli inscription.[23] After the battle, the Pāṇḍya King assumed the *biruda* of *cōṇāṭu koṇṭaruliya*, "the one who took the Cōḻa country," and restored the throne to the defeated Cōḻa ruler.

In this political scenario, which saw the rise of the Madurai kingdom after centuries of Cōḻa interregnum, the Pāṇḍyas confirmed themselves as a significant power in the South, together with the weakened Tanjavur centre—especially under the rule of Rājarāja III (1216–1246)—and the rising influence of the Hōysaḷa kingdom in Karnataka. The 13th century CE saw the development of balance and political relations of these three kingdoms; interactions between them may also be observed in the courtly literary production in Sanskrit.

The *Gadyakarṇāmṛta* of Sakala Vidyācakravartin, poet laureate at the Hōysaḷa court, is a work that indeed testifies to the historical interrelations between the three major political powers in the South in medieval times, the Cōḻa, the Pāṇḍya and the Hōysaḷa, and narrates in poetical form the story of war between Vīra Narasiṃha II (1220–1234) and Māṟavarman Sundara I. At the end of the conflict narrated in the *gadyakāvya*, the Pāṇḍya sovereign is defeated and Narasiṃha compels Sundara to pay tribute. What is more interesting is the way the author of the *Gadyakarṇāmṛta* describes the scene and characterises the Madurai lord; below the relative passage from the prose:[24]

> *karadīcakāra cakrāratalatāḍanamukharaśatamakhamakuṭakarmograbhujacaṇḍimānaṃ pāṇḍyādhipam |*
>
> [Vīra Narasiṃha] rendered tributary the Pāṇḍya king, [who resembled] the fierce Lord Ugra against the crown of the one hundred-headed One—Indra—striking it with the surface of his speedy discus.

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[23] EI XXII, no.10.

[24] I quote the text of the *Gadyakarṇāmṛta* according to the critical edition by S. S. Janaki (Janaki 1981); the excerpt from the *gadyakāvya* is taken from p. 81 of the critical text.

It is noteworthy how Sakala Vidyācakravartin, a poet at the rival Hōysaḷa court, choose to refer to Māṟavarman Sundara I by employing a periphrasis built upon one of the Pāṇḍya dynastic motifs, which, evidently, circulated among the political elites of the South in the 13th century. Nevertheless, contrary to the textual evidence previously analysed and afferent to the Pāṇḍya ideological domain, in the *Gadyakarṇāmṛta* the royal narrative is not attributed to an anonymous sovereign as in the early Pāṇḍya epigraphical *praśasti*s of the first imperial phase, but to the purāṇic ruler Ugra, the son of Śiva-Sundareśvara as king of Madurai according to the religious repository of the Madurai Tamil *talapurāṇam*. This "alternative" version, which in all probability implied a process of variation of the "original" dynastic motif presumably started in medieval times, culminating with the composition of the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* by Perumpaṟṟapuliyūr Nampi in the late 13th century,[25] will find attestation and application

[25] Perumpaṟṟapuliyūr Nampi composed his work in Chidambaram, the seat of the medieval *śaiva* tradition in the South. The dating to the second half of the 13th century can be perhaps conjectured thanks to evidence found in an inscription (ARE 1908, no.183), dated approximately to 1298, during the 30th regnal year of King Māṟavarman Kulaśekhara Pāṇḍya I (Jeyechandrun 1985: 25). This inscription records the redistribution of lands close to Chidambaram, granted to a certain Perumpaṟṟapuliyūr Nampi, who, fairly reasonably, can be taken for our author. The *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* is a collection of 64 episodes narrating the divine exploits of the god Śiva in Madurai (Sanskrit *līlā*, Tamil *viḷaiyāṭal*). The *Hālāsyamāhātmya,* traditionally considered as part of the *Skandapurāṇa*, is the first Sanskrit version of this Madurai cycle in seventy *adhyāya*s. As stated by Eva Wilden, the text is based on the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* and, a revealed by the analysis of the thematic development, is thus later than Perumpaṟṟapuliyūr Nampi. Moreover, Wilden has successfully proposed to date the *māhātmya* to the late 14th–early 15th centuries (Wilden 2014: 248), while Elaine Fisher (Fisher 2017: 159–165) dated the work to the 17th century. The fame of Nampi's work is obscured by the "other" *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*, by Parañcōti Muṉivar, composed during the 17th century in the Nāyaka Madurai and the coeval "adapted" Sanskrit version, the *Śivalīlārṇavamahākāvya* by Nīlakaṇṭha Dīkṣita. The episode of the fight between Ugra and Indra is narrated in the 44th chapter of Nampi's *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*, titled *intiraṉ muṭimēlvaḷaiyeṟinta tiruviḷaiyāṭal*, "The sacred sport of the breaking of Indra's crown with the discus," and in *adhyāya* XVIII of the *Hālāsyamāhātmya*.

in the later Pāṇḍya ideology, especially in the Sanskrit courtly production of the Teṅkāśi phase (14th–18th centuries CE).[26]

Striking Indra's crown in Teṅkāśi

The ensuing collapse of the Madurai empire and the end of the second imperial phase constituted one of the foremost turning points in the history of medieval South India. After the great regnal periods of Jaṭāvarman Sundara I (1251–1269 CE) and Māṟavarman Kulaśekhara I (1268–1308), the internal structure of the restored Pāṇḍya kingdom abruptly collapsed as a result of a sudden havoc, which coincided with specific historical changes fated to influence the politics of the South.

In the early 14th century, the Muslim invasion of the South, led by Malik Kāfūr, general of the Delhi Sultan, 'Alā' ud-dīn K̲h̲aljī (1267–1316), destabilised the political balance of the southern regions, already aggravated by the progressive weakening of the Hōysaḷa kingdom in Karnataka. According to some outdated historical views, in this critical moment, the Pāṇḍya King Māṟavarman Kulaśekhara I was murdered by his son, Jaṭāvarman Sundara III (acceded 1304), who then started a war against his brother, Jaṭāvarman Vīra II (acceded 1297)

[26] The motif of the king fighting Indra, obtaining his garland and capturing the clouds, is obviously attested before the later Teṅkāśi phase, especially during the "second" Pāṇḍya imperial phase. Several *meykkīrti*s contain celebratory accounts of the Madurai rulers which refer to the canonical royal narratives, including this very same motif of the fight against Indra and the supersession of god's power. To illustrate, quoted below are two excerpts from royal eulogies, one dedicated to Jaṭāvarman Parāntaka (1130–?) and the other to Jaṭāvarman Kulaśekhara (1190–1218):

> *teṉmaturā purittōṉṟit tēvēntiraṇō ṭiṇitirunta* (Cuppiramaṇiyam 1983: 223)
> who, having appeared in the city of southern Mathurā, sat down (with) sweetness with Indra

> *cuntara mārpiṉil intiraṉ pūṭṭiya*
> *āramum alaṅkalum aḻakuṭaṉ tikaḻa* (Cuppiramaṇiyam 1983: 231)
> while the garland that Indra fastened on his beautiful chest and the wreath (crown?) were graciously shining

(Nilakanta Sastri 1958: 208–209; Derrett 1957: 151). In reality, this reference to a supposed assassination of Kulaśekhara and the hostility between the two princes was inherited and confirmed as a historical evidence by historians due to a distorted account presented by the Persian author Waṣṣāf al-Ḥaḍrat (1265–1328) in his *Tajziyat al-amṣār wa-tazjiyat al-a'ṣār*. N. Sethuraman firstly noticed the incongruence between the foreign account and the South Indian coeval evidence, which present a completely different scenario concerning the Pāṇḍya royal family.[27] This period of instability escalated with the progressive Islamic occupation of Madurai and, in 1335, the foundation of an independent Sultanate by Jalāl ad-dīn Aḥsan K̲h̲ān, an officer of Muḥammad bin Tuġluq (1325–1351), the ruler of Delhi. The collapse of the Hōysaḷa kingdom after the death of Ballāḷa IV in 1346 and the consolidating tendency of the Vijayanagara empire (1336–1565 CE) heralded the end of the Pāṇḍya influence in the South and the consequent displacement of what was left of the old kingdom in the southern-western areas of Tamil Nadu.

Around the last decades of the 14th century, a family of rulers claiming direct descent from the Madurai Pāṇḍya empire organised in the Tirunelvēli area a centre of power that remained in a formally subordinated position to Vijayanagara. The dynastic connection between this obscure family and the principal line of Madurai remains uncertain (Branfoot 2012: 371); however, the new dynasty of Teṅkāśi (Tamil Teṉkāci)

[27] Sethuraman 1983: 6: "The Persian poet Wassaf (1312) states that Vira Pandya was younger and Sundara was elder. He further states that Vira Pandya was the illegitimate son and Sundara was the legitimate son. Wassaf was wrong. The Nallur record discussed above states that Vira Pandya was elder and Sundara was younger. Both were the legitimate sons of Kulasekhara. Wassaf states that Kulasekhara crowned Vira Pandya rejecting the claim of Sundara. This is also wrong. The dates of the two princes prove that they were crowned during the life time of their father Kulasekhara. […] Wassaf states that at the close of Hijira year 709 i.e. in the year 1310 A. D. Sundara Pandya killed his father Kulasekhara. This is totally wrong. Inscriptions prove that Kulasekhara lived till 1312. A record which comes from Thirumal Ukandan Kottai belongs to the second son Jatavarman Sundara Pandya, year 9, corresponding to 1312. It states that Sundara arranged services to God for the welfare of his father."

represented a surprising, though greatly inferior ruling continuum after the havoc of the 14th century CE.

The new Pāṇḍya court in Teṅkāśi began to consolidate its claim as the rightful heir to the Madurai empire with a precise ideological strategy, namely the recovering and reuse of the official imperial documents and their repertoire of dynastic motifs, *in primis* the narrative of the fight between the king and Indra. This political path was obviously the most efficient one to present for public display the new dynasty visualised as a historical continuation of the old imperial state in Madurai which had collapsed decades earlier.

A fundamental detail we must firmly take into consideration is that from the 14th up to the second half of the 16th century, the Pāṇḍya official records totally lack genealogical *praśasti*s (Branfoot 2012: 329). That is to say that for the initial part of the Teṅkāśi period, the official narrative of the new ruling court did not project its political self-perception through the usual dynamic of dynastic genealogies. Only in the first decades of the 16th century, do we find testimony of deep revival of genealogical celebrations, the foremost of which is the one opening the most important evidence to reconstruct the royal history of the later period, the Putukkōṭṭai plates.

The primary medium through which the Teṅkāśi royal line expressed its public identity and legitimisation as inheritors of the lost Madurai line was initially conceptualised in the cosmopolitan discourse of the Sanskrit classical *kāvya* production, the *Pāṇḍyakulodayamahākāvya*. The *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* ("The Resurgence of the Pāṇḍya Race") is an incomplete "historical" poem by Maṇḍalakavi in twelve *sarga*s narrating the mythical origins and establishment of the Madurai kingdom and its evolution into the later phase. The initial sections of the poem (cantos I–V) retell the history of the dynasty according to the mythological accounts of the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*, and the *Hālāsyamāhātmya*.[28]

[28] The contents of the first part of the *mahākāvya* are of course not coincidental. The recovery of the purāṇic material of the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* had the function of presenting the dynastic identity of the new ruling centre as in line with and firmly anchored to the Madurai past. Maṇḍalakavi, introducing several modifications in the royal genealogies of the Pāṇḍya rulers in Nampi's work, shaped the identity

The "proper" historical matter presented by the *mahākāvya*, starting approximately from *sarga* VI, reaches up to the times of King Jaṭilavarman Kōṉērinmaikoṇṭāṉ Parākrama Kulaśekhara (c. 1480–1508 CE), who, in all probability, was the patron of the poem's author.[29]

In the fifth canto, Maṇḍalakavi extensively reworked the traditional narrative of the Pāṇḍya king and Indra—he expanded it and bestowed upon it a proper literary structure, at first only developed in the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*. At the closing of *sarga* IV (stanzas 38–45), we learn, due to a drought in the South, Śiva's son Ugra decided to visit *Indraloka*, together with the Cōḻa and Cēra kings, to ask the god for rains to restore the prosperity to their land. While the other monarchs showed respect in front of Indra, the bold Ugra sat on the heavenly throne and provoked the wrath of the god, who decided then to destroy the Pāṇḍya country. The clouds attacked Madurai with heavy rains (stanzas 10–23); however, they were eventually captured and thrown into jail by Ugra (29–31). At this turn of events, Indra declared outright war on the audacious Ugra, son of Śiva, and prepared to march with his heavenly army against Madurai (verses 35–45). In a series of virtuosic stanzas (49–66), the poet describes the fierce duel between the god and Ugra; only by using the discus (*valaya*) given to him by his father Śiva, did the Pāṇḍya king manage to defeat Indra.[30]

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of the Teṅkāśi kings as successors of those mythical ancestors who acted in the "Sacred Games of Śiva." Such literary and political strategy was also adopted by the Nāyakas of Madurai (1559–1736 CE), who employed the ideological past of the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* to justify their role as rulers of the old imperial capital of the Pāṇḍyas. On this broader perspective the interest reader may refer to the detailed study in Branfoot 2012.

29 The reign of Jaṭilavarman Kulaśekhara is testified to by a dozen of unpublished records (ARE 1918, nos. 502–505, 508–510, 516, 524, 527, 534, 618); this epigraphical documentation gives king's access to the throne as 1480. Record no. 618 testifies to the great patronage the monarch extended to temple building, just like his maternal uncle, Jaṭilavarman Arikesari Parākrama (1422–1463 CE), the founder of the Kāśīviśvanātha temple. This inscription, dated to 1508, involves donations and maintenance of the Aḻakiya Cokkanār and Varaṃturam Perumāḷ temples in Kaṭayanallūr (Tirunelvēli district).

30 The original nucleus of the story of Indra's defeat is attested a few centuries before the original model of the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*. The episode is hinted at in

It is worth analysing this specific segment, namely the acme of the battle, which took place between Ugra Pāṇḍya (as in the source model and in the *Gadyakarṇāmṛta*) and Indra; the relative stanzas (66–67) describe the culmination of the clash between the King and the god as follows:[31]

śastrair ajayyam ahitaṃ śamayāmuneti
pūrvaṃ puratrayabhidā valayaṃ vitīrṇam |
maulau pravātamathanasya [*mumoca*] *tena*
nirbhinnam asya makuṭaṃ nipapāta bhūmau || 66 ||

[Saying:] "Destroy the enemy invincible by [other] weapons!" [Ugra Pāṇḍya] threw at the head of the Slayer of Pravāta (Indra) the disk bestowed (on him) earlier by the Destroyer of the Three Cities (Śiva) and made his crown to fall to the ground in pieces.

śakalitamakuṭaṃ samantataḥ
śithilaśiroruhaśīrṇaśekharam |
amarapatim ayaṃ vibhāvayann
abhajata kām api vikriyāṃ hriyā || 67 ||

At seeing the Lord of the Immortals (Indra) with injured head, scattered hair, and the crown reduced totally to pieces, [Ugra Pāṇḍya] felt a certain agitation out of shame.

The *mahākāvya*'s description is perfectly in line with the primary narrative fulcrum but Maṇḍalakavi, contrary to the original nucleus, has introduced some ideological modifications relevant for other parts of the work. It is enough here to analyse Ugra's reaction to Indra's defeat. Once the fight is over, the Pāṇḍya ruler realizes that he had

stanza 154 of the anonymous *Pāṇṭikkōvai* ("String of Stanzas [for the] Pāṇṭiya"), an intertext handed down in Nakkīraṉār's commentary on the *Kaḷaviyal eṉṟa Iṟaiyaṉār Akkapporuḷ*, a treatise on Tamil poetics dated approximately to the 8th century CE. The reader may refer to Buck and Paramasivan 1997: 161–162 for further details.

31 I quote the text of *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* according to the critical edition (Sarma 1981).

defeated the lord of the gods and had almost subverted the divine order of the world.[32] In the following stanza, Maṇḍalakavi depictes Ugra acting in the most significant of ways, trying to make amends for his impudence:

> *apacaraṇam idaṃ kṣamasva me*
> *valamathaneti vadan mahīpatiḥ* |
> *mukuṭam adhiśiro marutvato*
> *nyadhita mumoca nīradacchadam* || 68 ||
>
> The King, saying: "O Destroyer of Vala! Please forgive this imprudent action of mine!," replaced the crown on Indra's head and released the imprisoned clouds.

Ugra thus atones for the *apacaraṇa* and his sin by placing the crown back on the head of the god. This detail is far from coincidental: the Pāṇḍya sovereign, after having defeated Indra, restored the emblem of Indra's authority and, moreover, released the divine power embodied by the clouds. Through this, Ugra not only acknowledged the power of god but was also the one to legitimize it by crowning the heavenly ruler while simultaneously reassuming his own role of lord of Madurai, and reestablishing the natural order of the world.

The difference in the presentation of the royal narrative between the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* and its model appears even more significant if we compare the description at the end of the episode, specifically with reference to the moment when Indra's crown is shattered. Quoted below is the parallel passage from the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*

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[32] According to Monier-Williams 2005: 955, the term *vikriyā* is registered with the meaning of "agitation, affection, altered condition." In my opinion, it would be very suggestive to see the employment of *śleṣa* here: the same term may also signify "rebellion" and, according to Apte 1965: 850, "violation (of the proper duties)." Following this second layer of meaning, Ugra, defeating Indra, has committed a real rebellion against the god, and a violation of his duty (as a king?); this interpretation would be most fascinating.

by Parañcōti Muṉivar, a work based strictly on Perumparrapuliyūr Nampi's original narrative:[33]

kāyiṉ maṭaṅkal aṉṉāṉ
kaivaḷai cuḷarri vallē
vīciṉaṉ kulicam taṉṉai
vīḻttu atu viṭuttāṉ ceṉṉit
tēciṉṉal makuṭam taḷḷic
citaittatu citaitta lōṭum
kuciṉaṉ añcip pōṉāṉ
tuṉṟā iṟatu arinta vīraṉ || 1105 ||

Such a man, as the Pāṇḍya [Ugra] was, threw with celerity the whirling discus like a thunderbolt; as [Indra] threw this thunderbolt, [the King] injured him, crushing the bright crown on the head of Indra who was throwing. Having been defeated, Indra, full of fear, ran off on his elephant.

In the source model of the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*, the god, defeated by the Pāṇḍya lord, ran away, in fear, on his mount Airāvata, whereas in the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* the narrative is far more complex: Ugra, recognising his *apacaraṇa*, asks Indra for forgiveness, placing the crown back on Indra's head, in a scene that has all the flavour of a symbolical coronation with a mortal sovereign acknowledging and sanctioning the divine authority.

Regional kings defeating Indra: The copper plates

As already mentioned earlier, in the last decades of the 16th century, the Teṅkāśi chancery started to produce official records containing genealogical *praśasti*s. These documents, issued comparatively late in the history of the kingdom, had the ideological function of displaying

[33] I refer to the Tamil text of Parañcōti's *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam* according to the Kaḷakam edition published by the South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society in Tirunelvēli (1931).

to the South Indian political players the public iteration of the new Teṅkāśi kingdom. In other words, the copper plates brought out by the Pāṇḍya chancery assumed the function of grounding royal identity of the new centre into the imperial Pāṇḍya tradition. As we shall see, the Teṅkāśi court aimed indeed at recovering the old Madurai documents, reemploying their structure, and adapting the vast repository of mythical and royal motifs, including the traditional narrative of fight between the king and Indra.

Among this inscriptional material, the copper plates discovered in the early 20th century at Putukkōṭṭai occupy important position, being the foremost source to reconstruct the later Teṅkāśi dynastic history. The Putukkōṭṭai charter, issued in Ś. 1505–1583 CE, during the reign of the Kings Śrīvallabha and his cousin Varatuṅgarāma,[34] is represented by a set of seven copper plates, engraved on both sides; the language is Sanskrit, while the script is Grantha Tamil. The principal object of the record is to register the donation of the village of Putukkōṭṭai (today in the south-east Tamil Nadu) to a group of Brahmins at the request of an obscure character, Tirumalairāja, defined in the document as the son and grandson of Timmā and Rāma Nāyaka respectively, and a great devotee of Viṣṇu Raṅganātha. In all probability, as observed by Gopinatha Rao, Tirumalairāja was a secondary rank officer and served under the Nāyakas of Madurai, to whom the Teṅkāśi kingdom was subordinated (Gopinatha Rao 1910: 63).

[34] According to the dynastic genealogy as presented in the Putukkōṭṭai plates, the two Teṅkāśi Kings belonged to two branches of the royal family. Śrīvallabha was the son of king Jaṭilavarman Tribhuvanacakravarti Tirunelvēliperumāḷ (1552–1563 CE) and elder brother of Ativīrarāma (1563–1605). There is no evidence about Śrīvallabha, nor are there any dated records which would allow us to place his reign on solid evidentiary bases (Gopinatha Rao 1910: 58), apart from the Putukkōṭṭai charter. The plates simply state that at the death of Ativīrarāma, the ministers (*mantrivara*) anointed Śrīvallabha as king (stanza 19). Varatuṅgarāma was crowned in Teṅkāśi in 1589, as recorded by his crowning inscription in the Kāśiviśvanātha temple (Gopinatha Rao 1910: 115–116, inscription no. X); he was the son of Parākrama, Tirunelvēliperumāḷ's brother. He ruled presumably up to 1595, as testified to by his Karivaḷavandallūr record (ARE 1908, no. 275), issued in Ś.1517 (1595 CE), the last date ascribable to the ruler.

The Putukkōṭṭai record begins with an extensive genealogical account of the Pāṇḍya family which covers the first 41 stanzas (130 lines; up to the first side of plate 3) of the document, and which is articulated in three parts, the purāṇic, mythical, and historical. This internal structure of the document is clearly based on the early Pāṇḍya imperial documents, which present the very same articulation and dynastic motifs, starting approximately from the first decades of the 10th century CE.[35] The first section briefly traces the origin of the dynasty from Viṣṇu, and his descendants Brahma, Atri and Candra, the moon (stanza 6). The legendary section opens with the exploits of unnamed legendary rulers (stanzas 7–12), while the proper historical section covers vv. 13–41. In the mythical section, recording the exploits of the ancestral Pāṇḍya rulers, we read as follows:[36]

yatsambhavo jalanidhi surakāryahetos tu-
lyaṃ mamantha puruṣeṇa purātanena |
kaścit samastanṛpamaulivibhinnaśiṣṭa-
maulim babhañja yad valāt valaśasanasya || 10 ||

[There was a Pāṇḍya King who] churned the ocean, a task to be done for the gods, together with the ancient Primordial Man; a certain one shattered by force the crown of the slayer of Vala, which was left all in pieces.

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[35] The early Pāṇḍya *praśasti*s, especially those dated to the first imperial phase, presented the same structure, namely a genealogical introduction articulated in the purāṇic, mythological, and historical parts. For instance, the family eulogy of the Taḷavāypuram plates of Parāntaka Vīranārāyaṇa, dated to 910 CE, the very first instance of this canonical structure, begins with *maṅgalaśloka*s to Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva (vv. 1–4), proceeding then with the purāṇic section (v. 5), then the legendary one (vv. 6–12), and, lastly, with the historical part mentioning Parāntaka himself and his brother Varaguṇa II (vv. 13–17). For these copperplates the interested reader may refer to Krishnan 2002: 72–83. This very same articulation in three parts will be kept in all the Teṅkāśi dynastic eulogies.

[36] I quote the original text of the Putukkōṭṭai record after the edition by Gopinatha Rao published in *Travancore Archaeological Series* 1.6. (Gopinatha Rao 1910: 64–82, inscription no. I).

The excerpt refers to the shattering of Indra's crown at the end of the fight with the Pāṇḍya ruler: if in Maṇḍalakavi's poem, for example, the narrative was focused on Ugra (in accordance with the definitive crystallisation of the Pāṇḍya dynastic narratives in Nampi's *Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟpurāṇam*), here we have an unnamed sovereign. It appears that in recovering the dynastic repertoire of the Madurai phase, the Teṅkāśi chancery turned to the old trends of the early Pāṇḍya royal repository and the original core of this mythological episode, as it appeared in the records of the first imperial phase. Even if this archaising choice was of the foremost importance for the new ruling line in order to publicly display its claim as the heirs of the Madurai kings, the Teṅkāśi court introduced several innovations in the canonical regal repository, as we can observe in successive passages from the same Putukkōṭṭai plates. More specifically, we can trace such modifications in the traditional Pāṇḍya narrative in the section devoted to the *praśasti* of the Teṅkāśi ruler Śrīvallabha (stanzas 20–27; second plate, *verso*), one of the donors of the grant. In this celebratory section one can find the mythical legend of the fight between the sovereign and Indra:

> *valayena kṛtaś cheda*[em; *kṛtach śeda-* ed.]*valārimakuṭo 'pi ca* |
> *sāhityasārvabhaumaś ca devabrāhmaṇatarpaṇaḥ* || 24 ||
>
> The one who broke even the crown of the enemy of Vala (Indra) into pieces with the discus, the Emperor of Literature, and the one who satisfies the Brahmins and the Gods
>
> *so 'yam pāṇḍyakṣitīndras surapatimakuṭīṭāḍanaprauḍhadhāmoddaṇḍaś caṇḍāyudhaśrīmakaramayayaśolāñchanodārameruḥ* |
> *vikhyāto vīrabhadras samiti jayaramācāruveṇikṛpaṇo vīra*[*ḥ*]
> *śrīvallabhākhyo vidhutilako ramyam urvīm praśāsti* || 27 ||
>
> The hero Śrīvallabha, the auspicious mark of the lunar race, rules the lovely Earth; [the King who is] a sword for the charming braid of wives [of enemy rulers] in victory and bears a resemblance to Vīrabhadra; the Pāṇḍya sovereign [who is] the great Mount Meru the glorious mark of which is represented by the fierce golden fish and who is the punisher possessed of violent power [capable of] hitting the crown of the Lord of the gods.

While in the first example of this omnipresent Pāṇḍya narrative, the motif of the breaking of Indra's crown was attributed to a mythical and unspecified sovereign—and to Ugra in the *Pāṇḍyakulodayamahākāvya*—in this segment, the regal repository is applied to Śrīvallabha, a historical sovereign.[37] It is quite clear that the Teṅkāśi chancery, in its reuse of the Madurai imperial *praśasti*s and their ideological background, distanced itself from a fundamental trend: recycling the same motifs, the new Pāṇḍya sovereigns projected their auto-perception through the same dynastic myths, but attributed them directly to specific historical rulers in an attempt to sustain their claim as the real heirs of the Madurai kingdom. Similarly, stanza 27 refers to the exact same motif of the shattering of the divine crown, an act still performed by the very same sovereign, similarly to the attribution of such legendary exploit to King Āriyapaṭaikaṭanta Neṭuñceḻiyaṉ in the

[37] In other official Teṅkāśi grants, the royal narrative of the fight between the king and Indra and the splitting of the crown is ascribed to Ugra Pāṇḍya, as in the case of Maṇḍalakavi's *Pāṇḍyakulodaya*. For instance, the Sanskrit Taḷavāyagrahāram plates, dated to Ś.1504 (1583 CE) and issued in the name of Varatuṅgarāma, is represented by four plates engraved on both sides. The immediate scope of the record was the granting of the village of Muruganēri (Madurai district) to Candraśekhara, son of a certain Chokkappa Paṇḍita, who served as a court doctor (vv. 23–24). In the mythical section of the genealogical *praśasti* (stanzas 6–10), we read as follows:

> *ugras tadīyo bhuvanaikavīraḥ*
> *pratāpaśauryādibhir ugra eva |*
> *vyatāri sindhurbhuvi tevanena*
> *vyabhedi caindraṃ makuṭaṃ ca yeja* || 9 || (Gopinatha Rao 1910: 119; complete edition in 117–125, inscription no. XI)
>
> Related to him (Jaṭāvarman Sundara I) [there was] Ugra, the Sole Hero of the World, indeed ferocious (*ugra*) for prowess, glory and other [qualities]; a might pleasure-garden was bestowed on Earth and the Ocean, and [the King] defeated Indra and shattered his crown.

It is clear that, in the Teṅkāśi dynastic narrative, the mythical episode was attributed also to Ugra, as in Nampi's *talapurāṇam* and in the *Pāṇḍyakulodayamahākāvya*, signifying the fluid nature of this royal motif.

Cilappatikāram eulogy or to Sundara I in the *Gadyakarṇāmṛta*. In the last instance, in the new Teṅkāśi royal ideology, King Śrīvallabha's prowess, capable of vanquishing the Lord of the gods, is a perfectly specular corollary to that of his legendary ancestors, who destroyed Indra's crown and ruled over the great Madurai empire.

Conclusions

As the analysis of the above evidence might show, the violent motive of the ruler defeating Indra and destroying his crown assumed a primary importance in the Pāṇḍya identity presentation and self-perception. This specific dynastic account, which as we have seen, started to circulate around the 5th century CE, appeared firstly in the *Cilappatikāram* but its genesis is not easily traceable. The available data allows only conjecturally to formulate a conclusion on its possible origin, as an independent creation within the narrative skeleton of the *epos*, or as a vestige of adaptation, else reworking of previous Pāṇḍya dynastic traditions assimilated by the textual stabilisation of the epic poem and later not preserved. Some attempts at explaining the possible connections of the legend of the king and Indra have been offered in this paper; presented arguments are based on textual similarities with other accounts in the pan-Indian epic tradition, especially those connected to the exploits of the sage Agastya, Skanda and Arjuna. If such data were coherent and plausible, the assimilation and modifications of these narratives from the pan-Indian epic tradition would testify to a precise attempt of the Pāṇḍya politics at projecting its royal identity into a wider ideological discourse since the first centuries of the Madurai kingdom. In modifying epic sequences and applying them to the Madurai royal repository, the literary and, more importantly, official chancery documents underlined this complex attempt of the Pāṇḍya court in forging the identity of rulers, at first regionally localised, and then projected into the wider and more participative cosmopolitan discourse of the early medieval political and ideological scenario.

Following the first occurrence of this motif, the narrative of the Madurai king and Indra found a primary place in the genealogical sections of the Pāṇḍya imperial records around the 8th century CE, becoming overtime omnipresent in the official chancery documents and acting as strategical tool through which the dynasty publicly displayed its history and ideology. The relevance occupied by this royal myth was not only limited to the perception of the local, indigenous courtly life but became a wider identity marker through which the political arena of South India of the medieval times perceived the Pāṇḍya imperial heritage. A further symptomatic evidence of the ideological impact of this myth was testified to by its recurrence in the first of the Madurai *talapurāṇam* inserted into the more generic frame of the *Śivalīlā*s, and its readaptation in the 15th–16th centuries in the *Pāṇḍyakulodaya* where the narrative was extensively modified in order to portray the new Teṅkāśi royal ideology based upon the canonical royal repository and project it into the wider Sanskrit cosmopolis.

After the period of Sanskrit production at the Teṅkāśi court and the long ideological "silence" of the later official records, deprived of any genealogical representation up to the 16th century CE, the later phase of the kingdom was amply characterised by the flourishing of family *praśasti*s. This foremost tool to publicly display the royal identity was based on the recovery of old imperial Madurai records, and, among their mythical repository, the myth of the Pāṇḍya king destroying Indra's crown. The official chancery carried forward this ideological enterprise adopting the contents of the previous Pāṇḍya genealogies, their internal structure, and their eulogistic apparatus. Such a political intervention granted in the Teṅkāśi optic an assurance of political continuity from the Madurai imperial phases. The royal repertoire characterising the trends of ancient Pāṇḍya self-perception, with its dynastic legends and motifs, was used to lay the foundational basis of the identity of the later sovereigns. This reuse of the political corpus forged an interrupted chain linking the old imperial public display to the ideological presentation the later rulers laid before the mid-16th century political scenario of South India.

Moreover, the enterprise carried on by the Teṅkāśi chancery was not simply characterised by a passive reemployment of the imperial records; this corpus was not only actively recovered, but also adapted and modified to serve the political purposes of its new patrons. The foremost instance of this trend is represented by the severe modifications effected on the mythological section, where, for instance, the aggressive legend of the king and Indra was not attributed to unnamed ancestors as in the imperial past, but to the specific members of the new ruling line.

Violence then, more in its ideological aspect, became not only a foundational element in shaping the Pāṇḍya identity, but also an ideological tool to grant legitimisation and continuity in face of the political irrelevance of the Teṅkāśi kingdom at the closing of the 16th century.

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Vīrabhadra, the Dreadful Destroyer of Sacrifice
Representations in Plaques from South India

ABSTRACT: When Śiva is not invited to the great sacrifice organised by Dakṣa, his bride Satī's father, he emanates from himself the terrible Vīrabhadra, who completely destroys the sacrificial arena. The remote origins of this mythical story, which is extensively narrated especially in the Purāṇas, lie in some myths concerning Rudra, Śiva's Vedic-Brahmanic precursor. The cult of Vīrabhadra spread throughout South India during the Vijayanagara empire, mainly thanks to the Śivaite sect of the Vīraśaivas. The long-lasting diffusion of his cult is also demonstrated by the wide production of metal plaques depicting this god. A few years ago the art collectors Paola and Giuseppe Berger donated a conspicuous collection of these plaques to the Veneranda Accademia Ambrosiana of Milan; they are currently on display in the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Many of these plaques are possibly attributable to the 18th and 19th centuries and their exact provenance cannot be defined at the present stage of studies, but most of them presumably come from Karnataka. They show an almost constant basic iconography, but also a wide range of different artistic languages. Here we propose a general analysis of this repertoire, and a more detailed description of some of the specimens.

KEYWORDS: Vīrabhadra, Vīraśaivas, Vijayanagara, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana

These pages focus on a collection of metal plaques depicting Vīrabhadra, a terrible hypostasis of the god Śiva, donated by the private collectors Paola and Giuseppe Berger to the Veneranda Accademia Ambrosiana of Milan, Italy, and on display in the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana since 2018.[1] It is a collection of great importance, probably the largest public collection of this type of artefacts currently in existence. The numbering of the exhibits, together with some provisional notes, was done by Marilia Albanese; there is no catalogue. To the best of our knowledge, this category of objects has never been exhaustively studied.[2]

The myth

The myth underlying the figure of Vīrabhadra, the "Excellent hero," is one of the most famous in the Hindu tradition. It is narrated, with rich variations, in a large number of Sanskrit works, from the *Mahābhārata* (XII.274; XII Appendix 1 No. 28), to many Purāṇas. *Locus classicus* may be considered the *Śiva Purāṇa,* which expounds the story in two different parts of the text (*Rudrasaṃhitā, Satīkhaṇḍa*;

[1] The exhibition, completely centred on Vīrabhadra, consists of 75 objects, including 67 solid plaques made, as we shall see, by casting or embossing; the detached pedestal of one of these; three cast openwork plaques; a small stone stele attributable to the 16th century that is probably the oldest object in the collection; a gold pendant; a mould, and a metal statuette. Here we deal specifically with the solid plaques, the most universally widespread type of such artefacts.

[2] On Giuseppe Berger and his activity as a private collector, see Freschi 2022. Berger's extensive collection of objects depicting Vīrabhadra, which includes plaques and other artefacts, is dealt with by Albanese and Freschi 2022. Some of the plaques illustrated in the present article are also reproduced there. An article in Italian on these plaques has been recently published by the present author in the Proceedings of the *XIII Dies Academicus* of the Accademia Ambrosiana (Pieruccini 2023). I sincerely thank Marilia Albanese who so generously made some of her unpublished material available to me; and likewise Paola Berger and Renzo Freschi, for their kindness in enriching my expertise. The numbering, dimensions, and some of the material specifications of the objects examined here are, of course, those of the Pinacoteca.

Vāyavīyasaṃhitā, I.18–23). Other Purāṇic narratives include *Vāyu Purāṇa* I.30; *Liṅga Purāṇa* I.99–100; *Kūrma Purāṇa* I.14; *Skanda Purāṇa* I.1.1–5 (32); and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* IV.2–7.[3] Here we summarise the general outlines of the myth, reproducing, with some slight modifications, a synopsis given by David Shulman on the basis of various sources (Shulman 1978: 112–113; cf. 1980: 113):

> Śiva married Satī (also called Umā), the daughter of the Prajāpati Dakṣa; but Dakṣa did not like his son-in-law and refused to honor him. Dakṣa performed a great sacrifice, but he did not invite Śiva or reserve a portion for him. Sage Dadhīca tried in vain to convince Dakṣa to invite Śiva. Satī, hearing of the sacrifice, begged to be allowed to go there, and Śiva gave her permission. She upbraided her father for not inviting her husband; then, in anger, she entered the fire and died (or burned herself by yogic fire). Śiva came as Vīrabhadra (together with Bhadrakālī, in some versions) to destroy the sacrifice; he uprooted the sacrificial stakes, plucked out the eyes of god Bhaga, knocked out the teeth of god Pūṣan, and cut off Dakṣa's head with the sacrificial knife. When the wrath of Vīrabhadra was appeased, and Dakṣa had acknowledged the greatness of Śiva, Śiva restored the sacrifice and put a ram's head on Dakṣa. Then Śiva took up the corpse of Satī and danced with it over the face of the earth. Viṣṇu, fearing that the wild dance would destroy the world, cut Satī's body into pieces. Wherever a part of the corpse fell, a shrine was consecrated.

In the latter part, the myth is connected with the *pīṭha*s, i.e. the "seats," of the cult of divine feminine power (*śakti*), which is to be considered a later addition (Sircar 1948: 6–7).

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[3] For the myth underlying the figure of Vīrabhadra, its sources, variants and connections, and its interpretations, with regard to both Sanskrit and Tamil traditions, an essential bibliography includes Sircar 1948: 5–7 and Appendix III; Shulman 1978; Shulman 1980: 110–131, 317–346; Doniger O'Flaherty 1976: 272–286; 1981: 128–130, 214, 249, and *passim*; Kramrisch 1981: 301–335 in particular; Klostermaier 1985; Mertens 1998; Ramasso 2003; Rajarajan 2009: 5–50, useful despite being somewhat naïve. On contemporary Coastal Andhra cults connected with the appeasement of victims of untimely deaths, especially children, who become fearsome *vīrabhadra*s, Knipe 1989 and 2005.

The Purāṇic descriptions of Vīrabhadra evoke a divine being of immense and invincible power, with terrible and shocking features, both dazzling and marvellous. The following is an excerpt from the *Vāyavīyasaṃhitā* of the *Śiva Purāṇa* (I.19.25–33, transl. Shastri 1970):

> He had a thousand faces, a thousand lotus-like eyes. He was holding a thousand iron clubs, thousands of arrows, spear, axe, mace, bow, discus and the thunderbolt. He looked fierce and terrible. The crescent moon adorned his crest; the thunderbolt illuminated his hands. His hair shone like lightning. He had a huge mouth terrible with the curved fangs and a huge belly. His tongue was like lightnings. His lips hung down. His voice sounded like the cloud and the ocean. He wore the tiger's hide dripping with blood. He ear-rings formed circles close to his cheeks. He had adorned his crest with the garlands from the heads of leading gods. He was bedecked in golden shoulderlets and jingling anklets. He was shining with heaps of gems. His chest was covered by necklaces. He was equal in exploit to the great fabulous animal Śarabha, tigers and lions. His gait was gentle and majestic as that of a stately elephant in rut. His lustre was white like conch, chowrie, Kunda flower, moon and the lotus-stalk. He was like the snow-capped lord of mountains who had become mobile. Flames surrounded him. Wearing pearl ornaments he shone brilliantly as the fire at the dissolution of the world.

Here we can only give an extremely brief summary of the prodromes of this myth,[4] which involve extensive and complex discourses on the Vedic-Brahmanic world and on the very genesis of the divine figure of Śiva. In the early Vedic literature, Dakṣa is one of the progenitors and patriarchs of the whole of creation; in the late Vedic period, this ancient role develops into his homologation with Prajāpati, who in this religious phase becomes the creator god par excellence. This is why he starts to be also called Prajāpati Dakṣa, as we have already seen. Later, in the Epic and Purāṇic tradition, Dakṣa is presented as the father of a numerous group of divine daughters, including Satī, given

[4] We refer in particular to Sircar 1948: 5; Long 1977; Kramrisch 1981: 3–70, 220–227, and *passim*; Doniger O'Flaherty 1981: 70–76, 114–117, and *passim*. See also footnote 3.

in marriage to gods; in the myth of Vīrabhadra we see him play the role of the Brahman who officiates at the sacrifice of the great tradition. It is also important to stress that, according to Brahmanical doctrines, Prajāpati himself is considered a personification of these sacrificial rites. As for Śiva, or rather Rudra, the Vedic god who precedes the classical Śiva in the Vedic-Brahmanic literature, his originally disturbing and marginal characteristics are well-known. Sacrificial offerings, and often only their leftovers, are granted to him with difficulty and hesitation.[5] According to a very famous myth, by shooting an arrow he interrupts the incestuous intercourse between Prajāpati and his daughter Uṣas, the Dawn, who flee in the form of a stag and doe. The divine seed is scattered but cannot go to waste: from it sacrificial rites arise, and divine beings and living creatures are generated. These are the strands that converge in the Epic-Purāṇic myth of Vīrabhadra.

Mythologically, the story of Dakṣa's sacrifice "was the culmination of Rudra's aeviternal struggle for recognition by those gods who had been critical of him from the beginning" (Kramrisch 1981: 325–326). Regardless of other possible implications, this myth in its basic connotations appears to reflect persistent antagonism and difficulty in admitting Śiva into the Brahmanical religious sphere, represented by the great "priest" Dakṣa. Śiva's inclusion in the "high" religion takes place through violence, a violence that in the mythical tale, we think it possible to assert, may sublimate—or reflect—potential or actual, and perhaps very concrete, social and religious disagreements and clashes.[6]

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[5] In this connection, a passage from the *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* appears to be particularly significant. Prajāpati excludes Rudra from the sacrifice; Rudra "pierces" the sacrifice and takes a part of it (II.1.2). There follows the maiming of various deities who approach this dismembered sacrifice; Bhaga is blinded for looking, and Pūṣan loses his teeth for eating it. The maiming of these gods also returns, as we have seen, in the myth of Vīrabhadra.

[6] Klostermaier (1985) interprets the myth from the perspective of the "conquest" by Śivaite currents of the important *tīrtha* of Kanakhala near Haridwar. The socio-political approach to this myth proposed in Upadhyay 1973 is also interesting, although we do not find his specific arguments very convincing.

Vijayanagara and beyond

The plaques under consideration have their origins in the spread of the cult of Vīrabhadra that occurred in Vijayanagara and its territory, in the Deccan and South India. As is well known, the great city of Vijayanagara, which corresponds to the modern village of Hampi in Karnataka, flourished from 1336 onwards, becoming the capital of a vast empire. After the city was destroyed in 1565 by a coalition of the Deccan Sultanates, the last rulers established a new capital at Penukonda and then at Chandragiri (both in the present-day Andhra Pradesh) and reigned over a limited territory until the mid-17th century. In the meantime, South India was fragmented under the Nāyakas ("Governors"), while the European colonial powers had entered the political arena.

In the development of the cult of Vīrabhadra in Vijayanagara, the contribution of the religious sect of the Vīraśaivas, the "Śivaite heroes," appears to have played a decisive role. Their historical origin is commonly attributed to Basava, a religious leader and reformer who lived in Karnataka in the 12th century. They are also known as Liṅgāyats, or "Bearers of the *liṅga*," due to their practice of wearing a small *liṅga*, a symbol evoking the divine essence, usually in a small box around their neck.[7] In many respects, this movement presented itself as subversive to canonical Hinduism: it advocated, among other things, the abolition of castes (although in a way these would later become part of the system), the elevation of women's status, and the total rejection of sacrifices of the Vedic-Brahmanic tradition and of a cult based on the representation of the divinity in images. However, the latter orientation

[7] Strictly speaking, the two terms Vīraśaivas and Liṅgāyats are only partially synonymous, but they are commonly used interchangeably also by scholars; for the sake of simplicity, here we adopt the designation Vīraśaivas. This religious current is still represented in Karnataka and adjoining territories and can count perhaps ten million devotees; in recent years, the community has made an official demand to be recognised as members of a separate religion, distinct from Hinduism. The bibliography on the Vīraśaivas / Liṅgāyats is extensive: for brevity, here we merely mention the general introduction by Michael 2011.

underwent a change in Vijayanagara, probably because the Kālāmukhas, another Śivaite sect devoted to the iconic cult of a terrible form of Śiva, were absorbed into their fold, and also to better compete with the other actively-practiced religions, like Viṣṇuism and Jainism, in which images played a fundamental role.[8] In this context, the Vīraśaivas adopted Vīrabhadra as their iconic deity, which is perfectly in line with their principles since in this manifestation Śiva plays the role of the great destroyer of the sacrificial rite. Moreover, this warlike figure is in accord with the sect's militant and aggressive attitude. The subversive role of Śiva/Vīrabhadra evoked by the myth can therefore still be read at this time; indeed, it appears to be at the very heart of his cult.

The Vīraśaiva community became very influential in Vijayanagara, not least because some important personages, including for instance two ministers of the very powerful king Devarāya II (r. ca 1426–1446), were followers of this creed and offered their patronage. Several other South Indian rulers supported this sect, in particular the Nāyakas of Keladi-Ikkeri; in their kingdom, that lasted from the beginning of the 16th century until its fall in 1763, Vīraśaivism was the official religion (Schouten 1995: 15–16, 259). It is also noteworthy that the cult of Vīrabhadra in Vijayanagara appears to have been adopted by predominantly mercantile social strata; it has been suggested that this fighting god may have represented a kind of ideal encouragement and protection for merchants, exposed as they were to the dangers of trading voyages, and because of the frequent and often violent contrast with the essentially agrarian social strata that were, on the contrary, of Vaiṣṇava devotion (Sarojini Devi 1987: 9–12).

In Hampi, i.e. in the ancient city of Vijayanagara, there are two important temples dedicated to Vīrabhadra; neither is very significant from an artistic point of view, but they are remarkable for other features.[9] One stands spectacularly on the highest point of the city,

[8] For these remarks and more generally on the Vīraśaivas in Vijayanagara, see in particular Sundara 1988: 106; Sarojini Devi 1987; 1990: 54–57 and *passim*; Verghese 1995: 23–25, 112–113 and *passim*.

[9] Cf. among others Balasubrahmanya 1985: 133; Devakunjari 1998: 46; Verghese 1995: 24.

Mataṅga Hill, and can perhaps be assigned to the beginning of the kingdom, despite the various modifications over time and the fact that the image in worship today is probably not the original. The other is today known as Uddhāna Vīrabhadra, and an epigraphic record documents that a statue of Mudu Vīraṇṇa, i.e. Vīrabhadra, was installed here in 1545 by a Vīraśaiva general called Jaṅgamaya. This temple, where Vīraśaivas still administer the cult, houses a colossal 3.6 metre high image of the god, of however uncertain dating. Several other small shrines and scattered representations are found throughout the city, and images of this god are also housed in the site's museum, testifying to his great popularity during the city's heyday.[10]

Epigraphic evidence amply attests to the foundation or patronage of places of worship dedicated to Vīrabhadra in the territory of the kingdom (Sarojini Devi 1987: 4; 1990: 54–55 and *passim*). These include one of the most famous temples in South India, namely the temple of Lepakshi (Andhra Pradesh), which was extensively patronised by the brothers Virupaṇṇa and Vīraṇṇa, officials under the reign of Acyutarāya (r. 1529–1542; Verghese 1995: 24). Among the sacred buildings founded by Nāyaka rulers, the one at Keladi (Karnataka) stands out for its artistic qualities; it is a double construction, in which two temples, the Rāmeśvara and the Vīrabhadra, are joined at the level of the *maṇḍapa*. The place saw several phases of growth, probably from around 1500 to the mid-18th century.[11]

Vīrabhadra is depicted with some variants in the sculpture of Vijayanagara and the later kingdoms. However, the available documentation seems to show that the iconography that was to become substantially crystallised in the plaques, and which we will see shortly, was soon widespread in its basic elements and was probably prevalent in the territory of Karnataka.[12]

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10 Cf. Balasubramanya 1985; for lists, Verghese 1995: 32, notes 137–139; 186–187.

11 Rajarajan 2006, I: 85–86; II: XXIII and Plates; and, for further information and bibliography on this temple, Dębicka-Borek and Sudyka 2022.

12 There seems to be greater pattern variation in Tamil Nadu. On Vīrabhadra's iconography, see Rao 1914–1916: II,1, 186–188; Nagar 1970 (where a plaque is also reproduced); Sundara 1983; Balasubramanya 1985; Sarojini Devi 1987: 6–8;

The plaques of the Berger Collection at the Ambrosiana

And now we come to the metal plaques depicting this god. This is a typology of artefact that counts a large number of specimens, as evidenced by their diffusion in museums[13] and on the antiquary market, and of course by the Berger Collection at the Ambrosiana itself. But, as we have said, to the best of our knowledge, it seems that this specific category of objects has never been studied systematically. Certainly, given the large number and variety of pieces, the Ambrosiana collection may prove to be very interesting for such a study.

First of all—and this remark is also valid for the specimens documented elsewhere—let us emphasise the fact that, at the present stage of research, it is basically impossible to establish the exact place of manufacture of the plaques in this collection, which, according to the information gathered, appear to have been bought on the antiquary market. They may come, to some extent, from the present-day southern Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh or Tamil Nadu, but certainly we must presume that most of them were produced in Karnataka, given the historical roots of the cult and, apparently, the equally historical diffusion of a similar iconography in the sculpture from this territory. The specimens show a considerable variety of styles, which may surely depend on the place of production, the skills of the craftsmen, and the social level of the patrons. On the other hand, this variety is a clear sign of Vīrabhadra's great popularity among several social strata: it must be remembered that the Vīraśaivas were opponents of the caste hierarchy. For the same reasons, dating is also problematic, but many of the plaques under examination

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Verghese 1995: 24–25, Plate 5; Ramasso 2003: 310–318; Rajarajan 2006: I, 130; II, Plates 87, 89, 90–92, 245–247, 250, 311; Rajarajan 2009: 62–63 and *passim*. Vīrabhadra is also depicted as an accompanying figure to the Saptamātṛkās; we will not deal with this iconography here, as it is not relevant to our topic.

13 To quote but a few examples as reported in the online catalogues of the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum: British Museum Nos. 1853,0108.9; 1880.753; 1924,1208.1; 1927,0106.1; 1940,0716.29; Victoria and Albert Museum Nos. IND.LOST.168; IS.33-1999; IS.536-1952; IS.537-1952; IS.538-1952; IS.1988-1883; IS.1989-1883; IS.1990-1883; IS.2295-1883; IS.2752-1883.

can possibly be dated between the 18th and 19th centuries.[14] The origins of the patrons, of course, are also reflected in the more or less generous size of the artefacts and the use of different metals. These appear to be copper-based alloys, similar to brass or bronze, or less common silver alloys, the metal used for some ten pieces in the Ambrosiana collection. The production techniques are casting[15] or embossing on a metal sheet; all the pieces in silver alloy are embossed. The different techniques in themselves imply different choices on the part of the craftsmen as for designs and details, and perhaps even distinct workshops.

The iconographic features of Vīrabhadra reproduced in the plaques of the collection can be summarised as follows.[16] The god is depicted frontally, often with his left foot (exceptionally the right) turned outwards, or with the lower part of his body in profile in the act of advancing most regularly to his left, i.e. in postures intended to express dynamism. He sports a high tiara, which takes different shapes depending on the style of the plaque; the wearing away of the metal often makes it impossible to identify the presence of the third eye on the forehead. He typically has a conspicuous moustache and is often adorned with a long necklace of skulls. He also wears anklets and footwear of a specific style (*pādukā*). These reproduce wooden clogs that are of particular importance to the Vīraśaivas because they are associated with the fundamental figures of this religious current, the *guru*s and the *jaṅgama*s, the "moving ones," i.e. the wandering ascetics. To this day, footwear of this type which belonged to a deceased spiritual master is an object of veneration among the Vīraśaivas (Lorenzetti 2020). One may also think that the dynamic posture with which Vīrabhadra is depicted may recall the concept underlying the figure of the *jaṅgama*s.

[14] Similar dating is attributed to comparable specimens in the British and the Victoria and Albert Museums (see footnote 13); see also Pal (2003: 303). But, at present, other datings, and even the presence of recent "replicas" cannot be excluded.

[15] Particularly in the cast examples, the highly varied nature of the metal alloys might result from the practice of melting the scrap metal that was occasionally available in a workshop. I am grateful to Renzo Freschi for suggesting this remark.

[16] Here we do not intend to exhaust all the—most often minor—iconographic variants appearing in the plaques in the collection, which could only be illustrated in a proper catalogue; but we will point out a few interesting details.

As we shall see, in only one plaque does the god possess more than four arms; of the four, uniformly, the front right one grasps a sword (*khaḍga*), the front left a shield (*kheṭaka*). His rear right hand usually holds an arrow (*bāṇa*) or a kind of pike (*śakti*), or a trident (*triśūla*); by far the most common weapon depicted in his rear left hand is a bow (*dhanus*). According to a pattern whose exceptions seem to be deliberate omissions, two small figures appear at the bottom on either side of the god. On his right we see Dakṣa with the head of a ram, his hands folded in the act of acknowledging the god's supremacy; while the other small figure on his left, also mostly with folded hands, can be interpreted as Satī, his bride, or as Bhadrakālī, which seems plausible when she—more rarely—carries a sword, i.e. she is depicted as a warrior. The ambiguity suggests, however, that the two female figures are to be considered somehow merged; in fact, Bhadrakālī mythologically embodies the wrath of the goddess. Normally, in the upper part of the plaque the sun and the moon, the symbol for eternity, and the bull Nandin and a *liṅga* appear, each member of the pair placed to one side. In rectangular-shaped plaques (the almost universal format in embossed specimens) or ones that are roughly this shape, a halo (*prabhāvalī*) inscribed within the plaque surrounds the god; in other cases the halo itself forms the upper edge of the plaque. At the top of the halo or plaque there is a *nāga,* or a *kīrtimukha*; below the *kīrtimukha,* a serpentine hood may also surmount the god's head. In several images the *kīrtimukha* also appears as a clasp on the god's belt. Occasionally, a sort of handle may be present on the back, certainly used to hold the plaque and raise it in worship; or there may be a pedestal, so that the plaque can stand alone in an upright position, in a temple or on a home altar. The frequent wear of the details and minor damage especially to the more fragile embossed pieces may depend on the bathing and rubbing that the plaques were subjected to during worship.

Let us now briefly comment on a few of these plaques which can be considered representative examples of what this collection offers, starting with some of more refined workmanship. Although small in size, perhaps the most remarkable is No. 34 (Fig. 1), a cast piece, which certainly comes from a high-level workshop. The image is of

great impact thanks to the ferocity expressed by the god's face, and it shows great plasticity, harmony of proportions and precision in details, not least, in the elegant foliate motifs and in the two rampant *yāḷi*s supporting the halo. Extremely accurate craftmanship is also shown by No. 3 (Fig. 2), embossed, in strong relief and in a very different style; here the background is filled by curls that seem to evoke Vīrabhadra's arrival in the midst of emanations of smoke and fire. Two outward-facing, barded elephants occupy the corners of the base and two *haṃsa*s hold the elaborate halo; Dakṣa is facing the god with folded hands. Interestingly, the weapon in the god's rear right hand appears to have the shape of a *nāga*, a detail that is also seen on other plaques. Among possible examples, this appears on No. 51 (Fig. 3), perhaps the most refined of the embossed silver alloy group.[17]

Two plaques of high workmanship are distinguished by different aspects. No. 20 (Fig. 4), cast and of conspicuous size, is irregular in shape and somewhat chaotic in its composition, but on the whole it is absolutely effective, also because of the god's extremely beautiful face. Here the goddess is missing; two small figures appear at the top, each on one side of the *kīrtimukha*, instead of the sun and the moon. No. 23 (Fig. 5), embossed, stands out because the god is depicted with ten arms; it is the only case in the collection where the four-armed scheme is not observed. Two other embossed plaques, No. 10 (Fig. 6) and No. 31, of simple but well-balanced design, are identical apart from their border and thus they evidently derive from the same mould; here the gesture of Satī/Bhadrakālī turning towards the god and handing him an offering plate is particularly graceful.

Several plaques show some less refined execution and, so to speak, a more folkish flavour. These specimens display, above all, less accurate proportions in the design of the figures, linear decorative elements

[17] In No. 16 a *nāga* appears in the god's rear left hand, instead of the more common bow. Indeed, in many specimens from the collection, bows and arrows, canonically the elements most often placed in the god's rear hands, are depicted in a sinuous shape that can easily overlap with the image of a snake. The comparison or full identification of lethal arrows with poisonous snakes is widespread in Sanskrit literature; it is very conspicuous, for instance, in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, particularly in Book Six.

and more crudely executed details. No. 72 (Fig. 7), a cast piece, is very worn, possibly, as we said, due to it being rubbed during worship; a peculiar element here are the two prancing horses. Significant examples of the variety of styles and formats are No. 58, which is embossed and the largest plaque in the collection (Fig. 8), and No. 38 and No. 50 (Figs 9–10), both cast. In the latter, the rear left hand of the god appears to hold a very stylised object, perhaps a double-bladed axe, which the god can also be seen holding in other plaques.[18]

Lastly, the collection has a very distinctive group of cast plaques which show a further simplification, or, better perhaps, stylisation of forms, even though the fundamental elements of the iconography are still retained. The plaques in this category are regularly of a smaller size, and they often take the shape of a sort of "hut," perhaps with the intention of representing a local shrine. See, for example, No. 68 and No. 4, the latter with a very typical shape (Figs 11–12).

Of course, these observations could be profoundly revised if further research could establish the places of manufacture and dating of these plaques; we may presume a connection with temples and sites of worship. Such identifications would take into account, or account for, the different features and styles of these objects. However, the richness of this collection already contributes to advancing the current state of our knowledge on this form of art and cult, which is decidedly remarkable, both in terms of its diffusion and its results.

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[18] No. 69 shows a singular detail: the god holds *vaiṣṇava* emblems, i.e. the disc, *cakra*, and the conch, *śaṅkha*, in his rear hands.

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Fig. 1. No. 34, cast copper alloy, cm 20.5 × 13.5.
Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Photo: Author

Fig. 2. No. 3, embossed copper alloy, cm 25.8 × 18.9.
Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Photo: Author

Fig. 4. No. 20, cast copper alloy, cm 34 × 20.
Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Photo: Author

Fig. 3. No. 51, embossed silver alloy, cm 18.4 × 14.8. Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Photo: Author

Fig. 6. No. 10, embossed copper alloy, cm 18.5 × 13.4. Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Photo: Author

Fig. 5. No. 23, embossed copper alloy, cm 20 × 16.4. Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Photo: Author

Fig. 7. No. 72, cast copper alloy, cm 22.5 × 14.4. Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Photo: Author

Fig. 8. No. 58, embossed copper alloy, cm 35.8 × 27.5.
Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Photo: Author

Fig. 9. No. 38, cast copper alloy, cm 18 × 10,5. Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Photo: Author

Fig. 11. No. 68, cast copper alloy, cm 25.4 × 15.5. Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Photo: Author

Fig. 10. No. 50, cast copper alloy, cm 22.4 × 11.5. Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Photo: Author

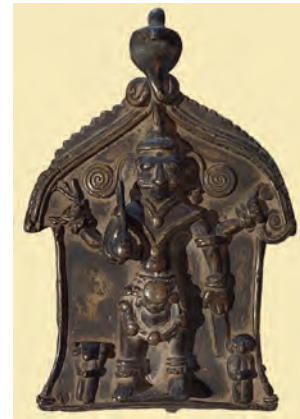

Fig. 12. No. 4, cast copper alloy, cm 15.8 × 9.6. Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Photo: Author

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The Goddess on the Lion

Animal Symbolism in the Representations of the Female Warrior Deity in Kuṣāṇa and Early Gupta India

ABSTRACT: This paper focuses on the genesis of the association between the Indian warrior goddess and the lion. As is well-known, this is a goddess with a multifaceted identity, who evokes both imperial grandeur and village cultic practices. This figure cannot be identified as Mahiṣāsuramardinī or Durgā in any Pre-Kuṣāṇa and Kuṣāṇa text or inscription. A considerable influence on her burgeoning representation was probably exercised by Nanā, a Hellenistic goddess, who takes on characteristics of the Mesopotamian Inanna-Ištar, typically associated with lions. Significantly, in the early centuries CE, this feline was still a widespread species on the Subcontinent and had already become identified as the fiercest wild predator, informing the long-lasting lion-warrior imagery. While the background and the rise of Durgā have been the object of several studies, relatively little attention has been paid to her symbolic association with the lion as a key perspective that may contribute to providing a deeper understanding of both the shaping and the significance of this divine figure. By analysing some of the most significant of the earliest iconographic and textual representations, this paper is an initial attempt to employ the feline attribute as a prism to trace the earliest phase in the historical process of the development of the goddess. It may provide insights regarding both the degree of entanglement between local cults and early Hinduism, and the interrelation between the

representation of this warrior goddess and kingship ideology in Kuṣāṇa and early Gupta India.

KEYWORDS: lion *vāhana*, warrior goddess, Nanā, Mahiṣāsuramardinī, Vindhyavāsinī, Kuṣāṇa, early Gupta, Durgā

This contribution focuses on the genesis of the association between the Indian female warrior deity and the lion. As is well-known, this is a goddess with a multifaceted identity who evokes both imperial grandeur and village cultic practices. Indeed, her iconography and later her mythology denote an inextricable and deep connection with kingship. At the same time, various characteristics indicate that she is strongly related to indigenous traditions. This goddess has been assigned various epithets, among which, since the 6th century, the name Durgā stands out next to Caṇḍī or Caṇḍikā. She probably represents the most dramatic and powerful equation of war with a deity.

While the background and the rise of this deity have been the object of several studies (e.g. Divakaran 1984, Coburn 1988, Stietencron 2005, Yokochi 2013, Sarkar 2017), relatively little attention has been paid to her symbolic association with the lion as a key perspective that may contribute to providing a deeper understanding of both the shaping and the significance of this divine figure. This paper is an initial attempt to employ the role of the feline attribute as a prism to trace the earliest phase in the historical process of the development of the goddess. By analysing some of the most significant of the earliest iconographic and textual representations, this approach may provide insights regarding both the degree of entanglement between local cults and early Hinduism, and the interrelation between the representation of this warrior goddess and kingship ideology in Kuṣāṇa and early Gupta India. I shall only mention the fight with the buffalo demon when it is relevant to the chosen perspective.

The presence of the lion since the early history of the goddess is not of secondary importance. As is well-known, an animal, be it real or fantastic, is associated with most of the Hindu deities as their *vāhana*. Scholars quite unanimously assume that the vehicle connotes the sphere

of the god's influence, symbolising his or her nature or function. The mount, however, is not the god or goddess's alter ego, but there is a constant and reciprocal allusive relationship between a deity and his or her *vāhana*. There is a play of reflexes that at the same time expands the divine personality and vividly expresses his/her distinguishing features. As a rule, a vehicle allows a deity to be identified, but there are cases where the same *vāhana* is shared by different divine figures (Dallapiccola 2012). For each deity, the association with the respective vehicle is attested from a different date—for example, while Indra rides the four-tusked white elephant Airāvata right from the ancient times as reflected in the epics (Bose 2020: 311), Gaṇeśa appears to be associated with the bandicoot or the mouse consistently only from the 6th century onwards.

The lion associated with the goddess is both a symbolic expression of the valences and functions attributed to her but also a reflection of religio-historical processes. In the early centuries CE, this carnivore was still a widespread and common species on the Subcontinent.[1] The feline was probably a recognised presence in the environment and human interactions with it were still significant, presumably oscillating

[1] According to Thapar et al. 2013, lions (and cheetahs) were brought to India from Africa and Persia by royalty around the times of Alexander the Great's appearance at the borders of India, and in the Subcontinent these animals would thus play the role of "exotic aliens." However, studies based on genomic data (mitochondrial DNA; see e.g., Barnett et al. 2014) establish that lions arrived in India well before the Vedic period as a consequence of an out-of-Africa migratory wave caused by cyclical changes in African climate. Representations of the lion occur in the earliest Indian textual and art-historical sources, namely in the *Ṛgveda,* where the *siṃha* is mentioned with striking frequency, and in Mauryan monumental art, where this large wild cat is glorified, appearing as a symbol of both royal authority and aspects of the Buddha's personality (Gokhale 1974: 113–115; Divyabhanusinh 2008: 57–72; Thapar et al. 2013: 37). An indirect indication that lions were still living across parts of the Subcontinent in antiquity is that they were present in Greece and Asia Minor at that time (A. van der Geer, personal communication, 10 February 2023). A drastic decline in lion population in India took place because of the increasing sophistication of weapons, which climaxed with the spread of firearms from the 16th century onward, and due to deforestation and other forms of anthropic interference in the environment.

between awe and terror. This animal held a prominent place in the Indian imagery related to animals: it had already become identified as the fiercest of the wild predatory animals and as the king of beasts. In other words, the representation of the lion was already part of the ancient Indian cultural vocabulary (Divyabhanusinh 2008: 53–79).

The figure of a warrior goddess associated with a lion cannot be identified as the Hindu Mahiṣāsuramardinī in any Pre-Kuṣāṇa and Kuṣāṇa text or inscription, at least on the basis of the available evidence. The earliest sources are material records—coins, reliefs, and sculptures—as we are about to see. As Srinivasan (1997: 283) argues, this goddess is "seemingly bereft of roots in Brahmanism as well as Buddhism and Jainism." A recent study by Lubin (2020) confirms that the Vedic treatments of Durgā do not allude to an association with a lion or to a battle with a buffalo demon.[2]

Interestingly, a considerable influence on the burgeoning representation of the Indian warrior goddess was presumably exercised by the goddess Nanā or Nanaya, a Sumero-Akkadian and then Hellenistic deity. Running the risk of simplifying the complexity at stake, we can state that Nanā herself took on some characteristics of a more ancient Mesopotamian goddess, Inanna-Ištar, who is closely associated with love, war, kingship, and lions, as attested from the 4th millennium BCE onwards. Nanā first appears in the Mesopotamian lists of gods in the Ur III period (c. 2112–2004 BCE), and in some texts is mentioned alongside Inanna (Parpola 2015: 256; Westenholz 2014: 172–173). Then Nanā is found to be worshipped beyond the ancient Near East, her cult spreading to the West and the East. According to Asko Parpola (2015: 256),

> Nana came to Bactria with the lapis lazuli trade by the end of the third millennium BCE, probably via Susa, where this goddess apparently had a temple around 2300 BCE and where her worship continued until Hellenistic times.

[2] For the association also of Lakṣmī with the lion see Srinivasan 2016, Raven 2020.

Possible attestations of the cult of Nanā are found in regions that were under the domain of the Śakas and the Kuṣāṇas. The Kuṣāṇas adopted this goddess as one of their deities, making her their main royal patron (Francfort 2012: 130; Falk 2015). She is depicted as sitting or standing on a lion on several Kuṣāṇa coins and is especially prevalent on the coinage of Kaniṣka (c. 127–153 CE) and Huviṣka (c. 153–191 CE). The goddess bears a lunar crescent on her head and her name is often written on the border of the coin, either in Greek as Nanaia or in Bactrian as Nanā (Fig. 1) (Falk 2015).

In addition to the coin images, a few rare seals from the North-West depict Nanā, such as a chalcedony seal now held in the British Museum, dated to the 2nd century CE (Fig. 2). Here too, the goddess has a crescent on her head and sits side-saddle on a lion; she also holds a sceptre with a lion protome.

Such an image also seems to have inspired some of the early Gupta coins (Altekar 1957: 27–38, Pl.I.6–13). In particular, a goddess accompanied by a lion was engraved on the reverse side of coins struck by Candragupta I and his queen Kumāradevī (319–335/336 CE) (Fig. 3). The third Gupta ruler seems to have elevated the dynasty to the imperial status also thanks to the matrimonial alliance with the Licchavis, which led him to crowning the Licchavi princess Kumāradevī as his queen. The female figure on the lion on the reverse of the coin might be considered a symbolic representation of Kumāradevī who guaranteed the legitimacy of the Gupta dynasty. The style in which the goddess is depicted sitting on the lion and the way she wears her upper garment are likely to be inspired by a coin type of the late Kuṣāṇa king Kaniṣko, probably Kaniṣka III, issued in the 3rd century (Altekar 1957: 27–38). As is well-known, coins travel, carrying with them, as they pass from hand to hand, images and symbols that are as much an expression of religiosity as of political power. According to Anant S. Altekar (1957: 31)

> The selection of the Lion device from the type of Kaneshko may probably be due to *Siṁhavāhinī* Durgā being the tutelary deity of the Lichchhavis, whose exclusive name appears on the reverse.

The importance of the goddess on the lion for the Kuṣāṇas is further attested by the finds from the Kuṣāṇa dynastic site at Māṭ, near Mathura, which was the Kuṣāṇa's winter capital. At Māṭ, the royal *devakula* ("house of gods"), along with the famous portrait statues of the Kuṣāṇa sovereigns, yielded the lower part of a standing female figure, with a couchant lion visible behind her legs (Fig. 4) (Ghose 2006: 99). That this figure represents the goddess Nanā seems to find confirmation in an inscription discovered in 1993 in northern Afghanistan, at the site of Rabatak (Sims-Williams 2004). It is from the first year of Kaniṣka I, most probably 127 CE. The text states that the king Kaniṣka derived his kingship from the goddess Nanā. This suggests that Nanā had a cult of her own, still in vogue during the 2nd century CE, and that she was one of the most important deities in the Kuṣāṇa pantheon. In particular, the inscription indicates that the Kuṣāṇas employed the image of the goddess as a symbol of the legitimacy of their dynasty. It is also worth noting that the stone bearing the inscription was found together with fragments of a sculpture of a lion (Ghose 2006: 99, 104 n. 42; Falk 2015: 266).

A warrior goddess, often associated with a lion, is also represented on several reliefs and sculptures of the early centuries CE from different sites on the northern Indian Subcontinent but found in large numbers almost exclusively in the region of Mathura. As is well-known, this was the area which saw the blossoming of the Subcontinent's earliest indigenous school of art that in many ways engendered Hindu visual forms. Srinivasan (1997: 282) identifies two distinct typologies of warrior-type goddess icon,

> either (1) she stands straight, without her adversary, but sometimes with the lion crouched beneath her feet […], or, (2) she stands with her weight on her right straight leg and the weight of the buffalo on her left bent leg, while her arms do battle with him.

In this early phase the goddess overcomes the buffalo by breaking his spine and strangulating him with her main hands which hold no weapons.

The first iconic type seems more closely associated with a lion. An example is a sculpture from Mathura (Fig. 5) representing a two-armed female figure standing facing forward on a lion couchant whose face is turned towards her. She holds a trident in her left hand, while her half-raised right hand is in *abhayamudrā*. But the second type, generally known as the Kuṣāṇa Mahiṣāsuramardinī type, can also be accompanied by a lion, as in the case of the small stone relief from Mathura reproduced in Fig. 6.

In another example from Mathura, a red sandstone relief dated to the late Kuṣāṇa period, the goddess wrestling the buffalo demon stands on the back of two lions (Fig. 7). The latter have been interpreted as "visual synecdoches" insofar as they would allude to a lion throne (Srinivasan 1997: 290), but this is not beyond doubt. She also holds aloft a floral garland with two of her top hands,[3] and with another pair of arms she holds a sun and a moon disc in each hand. The sun and moon discs, the wreath of victory, and the lion are typical elements of Nanā's iconography, represented here according to the local Mathuran style (Sarkar 2017: 27).

At the height of their hegemony, the Kuṣāṇas ruled over a political unit that incorporated ample territories of the northern Indian Subcontinent and part of the Iranian domain. The latter was familiar with Hellenism and different religious streams. The removal of political barriers led to a more fluid circulation of men, trade, and beliefs in such a wide area. The Kuṣāṇa civilization enjoyed indeed a syncretic and eclectic character (Mukherjee 1985: 410; Falk 2019; Srinivasan 2022: 60–62). This is reflected in the Mathura relief in Fig. 7, where components of different origins are merged together in the iconography of the Indian warrior goddess.

If we now consider the early Gupta period, a terracotta plaque from Nagar, Rajasthan (Fig. 8) shows the goddess with her left foot on the head of a lion crouching in the lower left corner, while her lower left arm, instead of encircling the buffalo's neck, is pulling its tongue from its mouth. On account of its iconographical features, various scholars

[3] This object is discussed by Srinivasan 2022.

(Viennot 1956; Mitterwallner 1976: 205) date this figure to around the 4th century CE.[4]

But the early Gupta type of Mahiṣāsuramardinī is best preserved in four reliefs at Udayagiri in Madhya Pradesh. As is well-known, this site is one of the most emblematic for the early Gupta sculpture of Hindu inspiration. For some scholars (Mitterwallner 1976: 202; Yokochi 2004: 116 n. 92) the relief on the north wall of the courtyard in front of Cave VI (Mitterwallner 1976: Fig. 4) and the other one on the outside wall of Cave XVII on the proper left of the doorway (Fig. 9) appear to show the goddess, with her raised left leg, resting on a rock that looks like a lion.[5] However, since this part is heavily eroded in both reliefs, it is very difficult to assess. Nonetheless, we can hypothesise that, if the object on which the goddess's left foot rests were a lion, she would assume the same pose in these two Udayagiri reliefs as she does in the image from Nagar (Fig. 8). According to Gritli von Mitterwallner (1976: 202):

> In all three reliefs: in the one of Nagar and the two of Udayagiri, the lion does not yet take an active role in the fight between the Goddess and the buffalo as in the later mediaeval images of Mahiṣamardinī. He merely serves as a sort of footrest, facing away from the Goddess to the proper left, uninterested in the fight taking place above him.

But, rather than uninterested, the lion might be portrayed as subjugated or domesticated by the goddess: in the visual language of the subcontinent, the act of placing a figure beneath one's foot (or feet) patently expresses the power of the character who is standing on or trampling someone or something; indeed, it demonstrates that the figure who is trodden upon has been defeated (Bühnemann 2023). The very representation of the goddess as Mahiṣāsuramardinī will undergo a significant transformation over the centuries, so that, while in the Kuṣāṇa

[4] Instead, Agrawala (1958: 124–127) ascribed it to the period between the 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE.

[5] In the most famous representation of Mahiṣāsuramardinī at Udayagiri, the one on the façade of Cave VI, the lion, seemingly, does not appear.

representational type, as mentioned, she strangulates the buffalo, fatally embracing him, by the beginning of the 7th century the goddess is usually represented pressing the buffalo's hindquarters downwards with her foot or knee, symbolising his defeat (Stietencron 2005: 131–143). It is thus worth considering that, in these representations of Durgā belonging to the Gupta cultural milieu, the connection with kingship and royalty might also be expressed by the act of overpowering a lion, which was most presumably the typical exploit of a sovereign. For example, gold coins of Candragupta II known as "lion slayer type," show, on the obverse, the king slaying the lion with an arrow and placing his foot on the animal (Divyabhanusinh 2008: 70).

It might be questioned whether type 1—a standing warrior goddess without an adversary—and type 2—a goddess holding the buffalo up by its neck—portray one and the same deity. However, the similarity of the weapons, ornaments, and the presence of a lion or lions in several examples of both typologies lead to the assumption that the two might be considered as different representations of one and the same goddess. Srinivasan (1997: 282) proposes calling her the Warrior Goddess, avoiding the usual epithet Mahiṣāsuramardinī since "there are no records, to date, which name the Kuṣāṇa Goddess." In other words, for this goddess there is neither an attested name nor any mythology in the available pre-Gupta Indian sources.

As Yuko Yokochi demonstrated in her studies (2004, 2013), the early history of the goddess consists of different currents that converge and give rise to a single, more inclusive, but nonetheless multifaceted figure that emerges as a supreme deity. One of her most conspicuous traits is her warrior nature, which was likely derived from a variety of bellicose goddesses worshipped in peripheral or tribal contexts with unorthodox rituals involving bloody sacrifices and alcoholic offerings. Some of these goddesses were deeply rooted in a specific place; it was believed that they were the divine beings who ultimately held power over the territory, protecting it or devastating it. Mahiṣāsuramardinī and Vindhyavāsinī were probably among the most powerful and representative of these figures; they also had the role of protectors of the cosmic order through their demon-slaying feats. The warrior goddess

thus unfolded as a powerful means of drawing rural or tribal goddesses into mainstream Hinduism, absorbing them into herself.

The name Vindhyavāsinī, "the Goddess who dwells in the Vindhya mountains," may have been a common appellation for several female deities whose cults dotted the mountain landscape. Indigenous groups living in the Vindhya mountains presumably propitiated this fierce and liminal lady of war, who was thought to have control over death and thus presided over battlefields. She is characterised as a dark-skinned virgin, riding a chariot drawn by lions (Yokochi 2004: 3, 54–55). Unlike Mahiṣāsuramardinī, whose killing of the buffalo shapes a specific iconography, Vindhyavāsinī does not seem to be portrayed in a defined iconic type.

One of the earliest texts that describes Vindhyavāsinī is the *Harivaṃśa*. Generally considered as an appendix to the *Mahābhārata*, the *Harivaṃśa* seems to have reached its final form between the 1st and 4th century CE (Sarkar 2017: 111–112, n. 30). This work attempts to incorporate the warlike goddess into the Bhāgavata/Vaiṣṇava mythology: Vindhyavāsinī is assimilated on the one hand to Nidrā, Kṛṣṇa's dark-skinned virginal sister, who is the female personification of Viṣṇu's cosmic sleep, and, on the other, to Ekānaṃśā, Kṛṣṇa's foster-sister (Yokochi 2004: 57–78). The *Harivaṃśa* appears to be the earliest written source to explicitly indicate that the lion is the vehicle of the Devī. This association, however, is not found in the critically reconstituted text of the *Harivaṃśa*, published by Parashuram Lakshman Vaidya in 1969–1971, but occurs in two hymns to the Goddess that are comprised in appendices to the text in some manuscript versions and which are thus quite difficult to date with certainty (Coburn 1988: 281–289).[6] In particular, the lion mount appears in the so-called Pradyumna's hymn (embedded in Appendix I 30 to *adhyāya* 99): "I bow to the one mounted on a lion, having as her emblem the best of lions" (v. 372).[7] In another hymn (inserted in Appendix I 35 to *adhyāya* 108), which, according to the narration, is pronounced by

[6] These appendices are collected in Vaidya's second volume (1971).

[7] *siṃhavāhāṃ namasyāmi siṃhapravaraketanām* || HV_App.I,30.372.

Aniruddha, the goddess is defined as *siṃharathā* (v. 34),[8] a compound that may indicate a figure either standing on a chariot drawn by lions or riding a lion; such a descriptor is nearly identical to the one found in *Skandapurāṇa* (SkP) 29.197a (see below).

But the entire myth cycle of the goddess Vindhyavāsinī, or better Kauśikī-Vindhyavāsinī, is narrated in the so-called early or original SkP. This text is one of the oldest Śaiva Purāṇas, probably composed in North India around the 6th century by a group of Śaiva brahmins affiliated to the Pāśupata tradition, as illustrated by various scholars working on the critical edition of this voluminous text (with the oldest manuscript dated to 810/11 CE; see, among others, Yokochi 2013: 33–76). The myth of Vindhyavāsinī's fight against the demon brothers Sumbha and Nisumbha narrated in the SkP (62–66) probably informed the account of the same feats in the *Devīmāhātmya* (DM 5–11), even though in the latter text the myth was no longer set in the Vindhya mountains.

In the narration of the SkP, Vindhyavāsinī is frequently identified with Kauśikī, while Pārvatī at times incorporates the goddess Kauśikī-Vindhyavāsinī; both Pārvatī and Kauśikī-Vindhyavāsinī are often associated with lions. Pārvatī is portrayed as "riding an excellent vehicle to which big lions are yoked" (SkP 32),[9] and as *siṃharathinī* (SkP 29.197a), a compound that portrays her as riding a chariot drawn by lions or with a lion as her vehicle. Such an association with lions is among the traits that indicate the assimilation of Kauśikī-Vindhyavāsinī into Pārvatī's persona (Yokochi 2004: 54–55).

In another passage, in a eulogy dedicated to Pārvatī by Viṣṇu, the latter affirms that the goddess, standing on the top of Mount Meru, shines like the sun, riding on a lion with a swaying golden mane (SkP 60.49).[10] At this juncture Yokochi (2004: 117) interestingly argues that,

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[8] *varāṅganāṃ siṃharathāṃ bahurūpāṃ vṛṣadhvajām* || HV_App.I,35.34.

[9] *mahāsiṃhayuktātivāhām* (Yokochi 2004: 54).

[10] *bhāsi siṃhaṃ samārūḍhā calatpiṅgalakesaram | dīptā prabheva sāvitrī merumūrdhānam āsthitā* || (Yokochi 2004: 117 n. 95).

> Because the subsequent two verses describe her [Pārvatī] as fighting with demons on the battlefield, shooting arrows in 50 and wielding a battle-axe in 51, her riding on a lion in 60.49 is also likely to have been associated with her bellicose aspect and, along with her fighting with demons in 50–51, would have originated in myths of a warrior-type goddess or warrior-type goddesses who was/were assimilated into Pārvatī by the time of the composition of the *Skandapurāṇa*.

Moreover, a few verses earlier (SkP 60.45), the text alludes to a buffalo sacrifice offered to the goddess by her devotees—a mention that seems to confirm the convergence of martial goddesses into the figure of Pārvatī as conceived by the SkP (Yokochi 2004: 98–99, n. 54).

In the Vindhyavāsinī myth proper, the goddess is described as fighting in a chariot drawn by lions. Such a vehicle differentiates her from ordinary warriors, whose chariots were drawn by horses. The text narrates that when Pārvatī assigns Mount Vindhya to the goddess Kauśikī as her abode, she endows Kauśikī with a chariot, which is described as "a large, divine chariot, radiant like the sun, drawn by lions" (SkP 58.22, Yokochi 2004: 114). Several verses later, at the beginning of the fight with the troops of the demons, the goddess' chariot is brought into sharper focus: it is "drawn by mighty lions with yellow manes flying, who were conquerors of hostile armies in battle" (SkP 64.39, Yokochi 2004: 115).[11] Moreover, according to the narration (64.20–26), before her fight against the demon Sumbha, Kauśikī had multiplied herself through the power of yoga and a number of goddesses had emerged from her limbs. Remarkably, each of these deities is said to be accompanied by women having the head of a specific animal or bird, who form the army of the main goddess Kauśikī (Yokochi 2004: 104–105). Interestingly, the text mentions (64.40b) the fact that Kauśikī's charioteer is a female figure named Siṃhī, an appellation that evokes leonine characteristics. Indeed, she

[11] The lion-drawn chariot finds a significant parallel in representations of the goddess Cybele; for possible contacts and influences with this Hellenistic goddess, see Yokochi 2004: 117, n. 98. For evidence of the Cybele cult in Bactria see Francfort 2012.

may be animal-headed, that is lion-headed, just like the other figures who flank the goddess in battle.

In this respect, of great interest is an inscription found near Chhoti Sadri in Rajasthan (Pratapgarh District), in a temple now dedicated to the goddess Bhramaramātā. The inscription records the construction of a temple for a goddess by Mahārāja Gauri of Malwa in a year that, according to Lakshminarayan and Sircar (1953–1954: 122) and more recently Salomon (2021: 273), corresponds to 490–491 CE. The *praśasti* addresses the goddess simply as Devī, and the way in which she is described lets us presume that she is identified with Pārvatī. Nonetheless, it is not clear to which specific goddess king Gauri dedicated the temple. Interestingly, in the first stanza she is characterised as a martial, triumphant goddess, who defeats demons with her sharp spear, riding "with terrifying speed a chariot yoked with fierce lions."[12] This inscription predates the SkP, hence such a description of a goddess on a chariot drawn by lions is not inspired by this text. On the contrary, it proves that the image of a warrior goddess associated with lions was not invented by the editors of the SkP, but rather the text bears witness to cults that were in vogue in those centuries (Yokochi 2004: 118–121).

As is well-known, one of the most important texts for the cult and myth of the Goddess in India is the *Devīmāhātmya*, embedded in the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*. This text was previously ascribed to between the 5th and 7th centuries, following the dating proposed by Thomas Coburn in his pivotal study on the subject (1984). However, in light of other and different typologies of sources, scholars have demonstrated that the composition of this work should be ascribed to the 8th century (Yokochi 2004: 21–23, n. 42), a period in which the figure of the goddess was already crystallised. Thus, for the present inquiry the DM is relevant as the culminating point of a tradition, which presupposes earlier developments; in other words, what is interesting is the world behind and preceding the text, considering the time it took

[12] 1c: *siṅghogra-yukta-ratham āsthita caṇḍa-vegāḥ*. Sanskrit text and translation according to Salomon 2021: 275.

for a divine figure emerging in the religious landscape to be literally fixed in a Sanskrit text. Various elements in the narrative fabric indicate that the work was probably composed in royal environs, and

> [t]hrough public recitations of this text in the Navarātra and other rituals for the Goddess, the king who sponsored them could have demonstrated that he assumed the power (*śakti*) and authority of the Goddess. (Yokochi 2004: 25)

Two earlier demon-slaying goddesses, Mahiṣāsuramardinī and Vindhyavāsinī, were woven into the figure of the great Devī in the DM. The association with the lion mount is here one of the goddess' defining traits, providing a vivid impression of her martial nature as well as her splendid majesty. One of her epithets is indeed *siṃhavāhinī* (e.g., *adhyāya* 2, v. 35b), and the lion is a crucial ally in the fights against the demons, particularly against Mahiṣa (*adhyāya* 3, 7, 14, 16). The feline mount is one of the iconic traits that impress the demons the first time they see the goddess:

> Then they [Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa] saw the Goddess abiding (there), smiling lightly, sitting astride her lion, on a great golden peak of (Himālaya) king of mountains.[13]

According to the narrative, the lion is indeed donated to the goddess by Himālaya, the god personifying the mountain realm on the fringes of civilization.[14] In light of Vindhyavāsinī's contribution to the evolution of this pan-Indian martial goddess, it is at least worth considering that such a gift of the lion by Himālaya might have, mythologically, reflected her tribal and mountain roots.

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[13] *dadṛśus te tato devīm īṣaddhāsāṃ vyavasthitām\ siṃhasyopari śailendraśṛṅge mahati kāñcane*. *Adhyāya* 7, v. 2. Sanskrit text according to Passi 2008: 379, translation Passi 2008: 300.

[14] *himavān vāhanaṃ siṃhaṃ ratnāni vividhāni ca* (*adhyāya* 2, v. 30ab) Sanskrit text according to Passi 2008: 353.

With regard to such an association with the lion, I find Srinivasan's argument (1997: 298) particularly compelling:

> […] it would seem that the Goddess has assimilated into her iconography a motif originating from non-Indian sources but sufficiently familiar in the local traditions so as to be capable of being assimilated.

This idea of a historical dynamic of convergence may be corroborated bringing into clearer focus an already complex picture.

As mentioned, there was still a lion population in North and Central South Asia in the early centuries CE. In the cultural and religious imagery of ancient India, this feline had already become an idiom of prowess and power, in both literary and iconographic vocabulary. Undoubtedly, this cultural fascination is not limited to South Asia or to a certain period in history.

> A large cat, gregarious in nature, noisy with its frequent roars, diurnal in habit, easily observable in open country, and often unafraid of man, the lion allowed itself to be seen as the king of the natural world by man very distinctly. (Divyabhanusinh 2008: 61)

The morpho-ethological characteristics of this animal, namely prowess, splendid majesty, supremacy, virility, and ferociousness, patently paved the way for its connection, in religio-historical processes, with royal power and martial sphere. In other words, the ancient ecological scenario and the empirical observations of animal behaviour on the one hand, and the cultural resonances of these and the models of symbolic representation, which answered the ideological needs of human society on the other, were among the most important factors that directly or indirectly supported the emergence of the association between the warrior goddess and the lion.

Moreover, as is known, symbolic associations survive for a long time once they have been established as part of a repertoire. In particular, the symbolic value of an animal species does not necessarily vanish with the animal's extinction. In texts belonging to different

domains of ancient and mediaeval Indian literature, the lion is invariably considered as the king of beasts and frequently employed to evoke power—its strength and nobility being qualities required in rulers and warriors. Thus, lion metaphors inform long-lasting king and warrior imagery (Pontillo and Sudyka 2016: 287–297; Sohoni 2017: 227, 232; Bose 2020: 148–149; Vemsani 2023: 3).

The warrior goddess's association with the lion connects her to at least three closely interrelated spheres: a wild, indomitable nature; the sanguinary ferocity of a warrior ready to fight; and majestic appearance, prestige, supremacy. These themes conflate into her granting sovereignty to the ruler. The goddess herself, as a proctress of the stability of the world through her demon-slaying feats, is to some extent analogous to a monarch.

As mentioned above, the close relationship between the cult of a goddess of a warrior type associated with a lion or with lions and a royal dynasty in South Asia is attested at least from the early Kuṣāṇa period onwards. The Kuṣāṇa sovereigns, just like all ambitious rulers, aspired to military success on the one hand, and to the legitimisation of their own power on the other. Scholars have shown that these rulers, rising from clan chiefs to sovereigns, adopted a wide range of royal titles, belonging to different cultural contexts, to legitimise their rights to throne and to secure loyalty of the subjects and feudatories (Rosenfield 1967: 202–206). The goddess Nanā was considered by the Kuṣāṇas as the foremost deity from whom the kings could receive royal investiture (Ghose 2006; Falk 2015); in other words, she was an integral part of the Kuṣāṇa modes of empowering the sovereign.

In the early centuries of CE, elements characteristic of the foreign figure of Nanā, a goddess already evoking imperial grandeur, subsumed into the emerging representation of the Indian warrior goddess.[15] As mentioned above, the lion was already associated with the Indian demon-slaying warrior goddess one of whose names and

[15] Neither Mukherjee (1969, 1985) nor Srinivasan (1997: 282–304) argue that the goddess is of foreign origin, but both indicate several elements of her iconography that appear to reflect foreign influences.

manifestations was Vindhyavāsinī. There was a degree of intermingling between local cults with early Hinduism, and the process was also informed by foreign influences especially thanks to the syncretic cultural and religious climate fostered by the Kuṣāṇas (Falk 2019). The iconography of the goddess on the lion, thus, took shape, and it subsequently thrived for centuries because of its capacity to meet the needs and clusters of meanings already expressed in local traditions.

The two levels, local and imperial, indigenous and foreign, might be considered as subsumed by the emblem of a lion. Indeed, this animal is not only a vital symbol for tribes of hunter-gatherers, often living in the mountains or in areas perceived peripheral to civilization,[16] but also an essential one for sovereigns, for whom the hunting of lions became a marker of royal prowess. Clearly, hunting was also a way to legitimise royal power over a region, while the king was simultaneously identified with the dominant predatory animal (Divyabhanusinh 2008: 71–79).

> In every culture, humans define themselves by non-humans. When they overpower an animal, they acquire, or seem to themselves to acquire, its qualities. Killing the strongest, most feared animal, you show yourself to be the strongest, most feared of men. (Padel in Thapar et al. 2013: 293)

The lack of more records of lion presence in the hill areas of India may be due to the lack of literate hunters in these regions (cfr. Schnitzler and Hermann 2019: 344).[17]

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[16] Dębicka-Borek 2019: 166–167. Also, the manifestation of Viṣṇu as Narasiṃha, Man-Lion, is associated with caves, mountains, and forested regions (Vemsani 2023: 72, 88).

[17] Durgā is consistently associated with the lion in classical mythological accounts, iconography treatises, and ancient and mediaeval images, but the tiger might appear as an alternate, especially in post-mediaeval centuries. Tigers frequently co-occurred with lions in many habitats in Asia during the Holocene, but historically they have been less vulnerable to human hunting, because they prefer thick vegetation, while lions lived in more open landscapes (Schnitzler and Hermann 2019). While lions progressively decreased in numbers and thus faded from the human experiential horizon, the tiger presumably offered another symbol of

The preoccupation with power legitimation will accompany Indian kings throughout the mediaeval times. In this period, states quickly rose and fell, and tribal kingdoms tried to gain a more advantageous place on a fluid political map, whose borders were continuously re-defined by the ongoing regional warfare. The foundation of a kingdom and the acceptance of the sovereign by the indigenous communities depended closely on the adoption and elevation of local female deities. As Bihani Sarkar (2017: 146) remarks,

> [t]he religious cults that developed in the vast majority of medieval Indian courts to enhance the divinity of the king all derived their key symbols (manifested in legends and rituals) from the ancient goddesses of the realm held to protect the royal lineage from its inception.

In brief, in the early history of the Indian goddess, the lion functions as a symbol of wild ferociousness and war and, at the same time, as one of regal power and prestige. In such an animal vehicle, ecological perceptions, symbolic re-elaborations, and foreign influences are interwoven. The warrior goddess associated with the king of animals will enjoy such great fortune in the history of Hindu religion because she had the capacity to integrate and link local and royal levels of power expression.

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strength and might, equal in prowess to the lion, but different in behaviour, since this stealthy feline is a nocturnal and solitary hunter and lives in dense jungles full of terrors for man (Divyabhanusinh 2008: 61–65; Bose 2020: 117–182).

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Fig. 1. Goddess Nanā sitting astride a standing lion, both facing right, reverse of a gold dinar of the Kuṣāṇa king Huviṣka (r. c. 155–189 CE). At right, the legend in Bactrian reads: Nano. British Museum (acc. no. 1888,1208.555). Photograph: © The Trustees of The British Museum

Fig. 2. Goddess Nanā, shown in profile seated side-saddle on a lion, crowned with a crescent, intaglio seal. Chalcedony, from Gandhāra, 2nd century CE. British Museum (acc. no. 1892,1103.100). Photograph: © The Trustees of The British Museum

Fig. 3. A goddess is seated facing forwards on a recumbent lion facing the left, reverse side of a gold dinar of Candragupta I (ca. 320–330 CE). On the right, the legend in Brāhmī reads: *lichchhavayaḥ*. British Museum (acc. no. 1910,0403.2). Photograph: © The Trustees of The British Museum

Fig. 4. Fragment of a standing female figure, with the head
of a couchant lion visible behind her legs. From Māṭ, Kuṣāṇa period.
Government Museum, Mathura (acc. no. 214A).
Photograph: courtesy of Doris M. Srinivasan

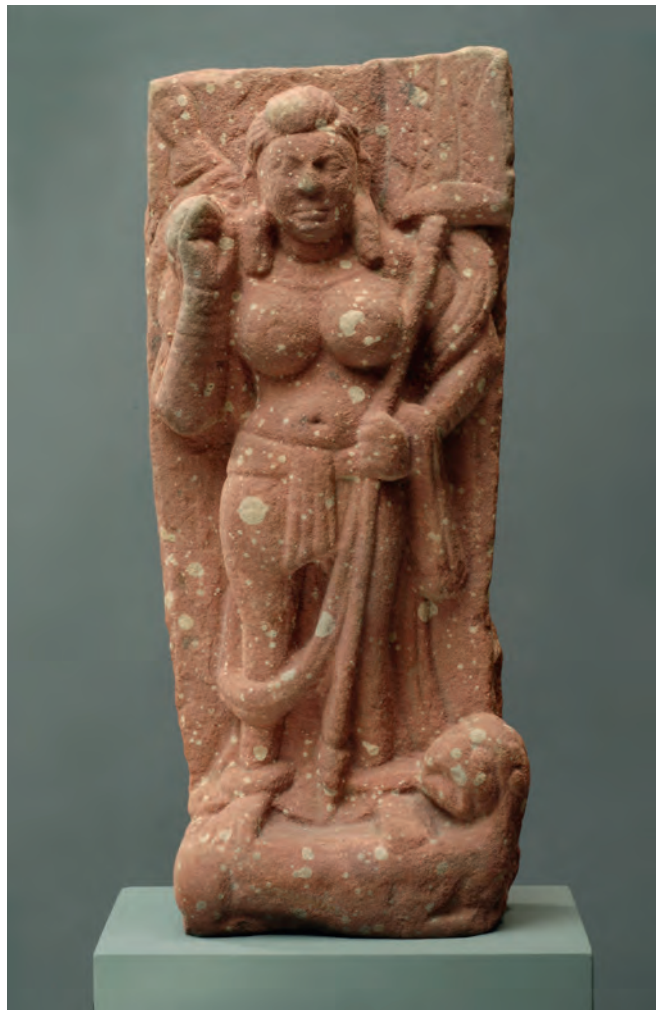

Fig. 5. Warrior Goddess from Mathura, ca. 2nd century CE.
Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin (acc. no. I 5894).
Photograph: courtesy of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin

Fig. 6. Warrior Goddess wrestling the buffalo, from Mathura, Kuṣāṇa period. Government Museum, Mathura (acc. n. 2317). Photograph: Chiara Policardi

Fig. 7. Warrior Goddess wrestling with the buffalo,
standing on the back of two lions, from Mathura, late Kuṣāṇa period.
Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin (acc. no. I 5817).
Photograph: courtesy of the Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin

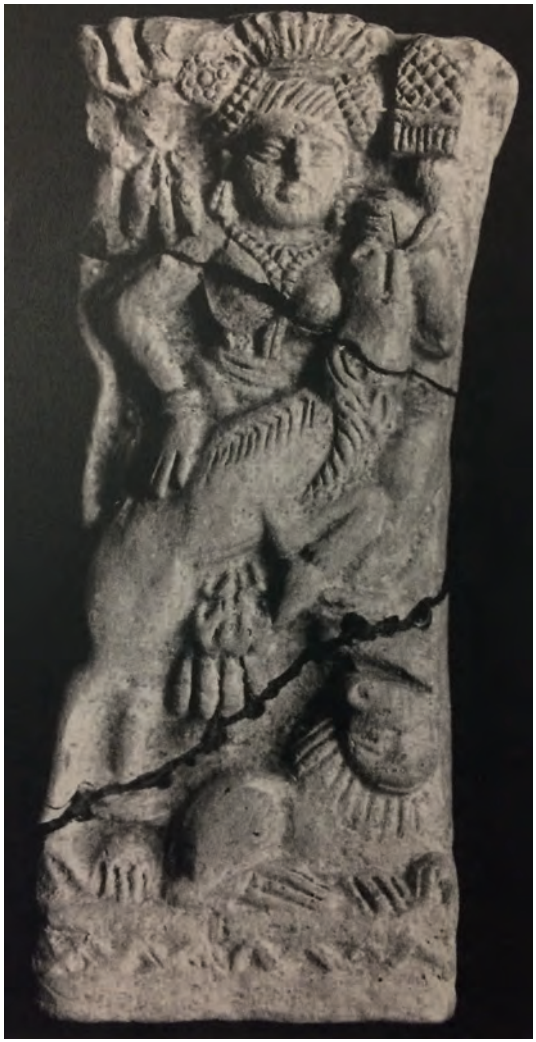

Fig. 8. Warrior goddess, terracotta plaque from Nagar (Rajasthan), 4th century CE. Photograph: after Agrawala 1958, Fig. 1

Fig. 9. Durgā on the outside wall of cave XVII, Udayagiri, Madhya Pradesh. 5th century CE.
Photograph: © Regents of the University of Michigan

Fig. 10. Four-armed Durgā seated on her lion vehicle,
probably from Uttar Pradesh, 9th century.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (acc. no. 1990.15).
Photograph: © The Metropolitan Museum

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Celebrating Violence
Some Stage Practises in Kerala's Classical Theatre

ABSTRACT: This paper is an attempt to probe into depiction of violence and death in the classical Sanskrit drama, especially in its avatar as Kūṭiyāṭṭam, a living performative tradition related to the temple theatre of Kerala. Stage depictions of terrible scenes of violence, and death as the culmination of it, will be examined here in the context of semiotics by including in its ramifications costume, colour scheme, tonal features and acting. The paper will first review the attitude of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* to presenting darker side of life on the stage and then turn to issues related to portrayal of violence and death in Kūṭiyāṭṭam. It will also take the opportunity to briefly touch upon other classical performative art forms, like Kathakaḷi, which are based on epic and Purāṇic themes, and are noted for their prominent portrayal of violence on stage.

KEYWORDS: *Nāṭyaśāstra*, violence, performance, Kūṭiyāṭṭam, Kathakaḷi, Kerala

The present paper argues that depiction of violence and death are very much a part and parcel of Sanskrit drama, and that they have been prominently projected in Kerala's classical theatre.[1] Bruce M. Sullivan (2007) has already examined the issues related to the depiction of dying on the stage in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and Kūṭiyāṭṭam, maintaining that despite the stereotyped perception of the Sanskrit theatre tradition of India "as avoiding, even prohibiting, depiction of death on the stage, death was both threatened and enacted on the stage, and has always been integral to the Sanskrit theatre tradition, as seen to the present day in Kerala's Kūṭiyāṭṭam tradition" (*ibid*.: 422). Largely agreeing with these findings and in continuation with them, in the present paper, the manner of the representation of violence and death as its possible culmination is analysed from the point of view of its impact on the audience. The paper will first of all examine the attitudes of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the seminal text of Indian theatre, as well as its commentators to the representation of the darker sides of life like violence. Further, the paper will focus on the issues related to the portrayal of violence and death in actual performance in traditional theatre. The paper will specifically take up performances on the Kerala stage, which provide the only living specimens of the traditional Sanskrit theatre. The paper will also take an opportunity to briefly touch upon other classical performative art forms like Kathakaḷi, which are based on epic and Purāṇic themes and which are noted for their prominent portrayal of violence on the stage.

Violence is defined by Merriam-Webster.com dictionary as "the use of physical force to cause harm to people, animals, or property, such as pain, injury, death, damage, or destruction." It goes without saying that Sanskrit drama is a far cry from Greek or Shakespearean tragedy which both show uninhibited violence and death on the stage, but neither is it always a meek and gentle dance-like spectacle fostering gentler emotions to the exclusion of harsh realities of life.

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[1] Because of the close relation between Kūṭiyāṭṭam and Kathakaḷi in themes as well as sophistication related to *abhinaya*, both are here regarded as "classical" arts despite some folk elements present in them.

The attitude of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* to violence seems to be ambivalent. Of the ten *rūpaka*s described in the treatise, it seems that perceptions about Sanskrit drama have been more inclined to the idealised world view characterised by the cessation of violence and conflicts. Apparently, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* seems to favour a censored and idealised version of life events on the stage even though there is a lot of ambiguity regarding the ancient Indian perception on this issue. A passage in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* prohibits direct depiction of certain acts of violence and scenes of death in an act of the *nāṭaka*, the principal type of plays. The passage, as translated by Manmohan Ghosh, reads as follows:

> Feats of anger, favour, grief, pronouncing a curse, running away, marriage, commencement of some miracle, and its actual appearance, should not be directly visible in an act. A battle, loss of kingdom, death and siege of a city, being not directly visible in an Act, should be presented by Introductory Scenes (*Praveśaka*). In an Act in an Introductory Scene of the *Nāṭaka* or the *Prakaraṇa* there should be no killing of a person who is known as the Hero. His flight, treaty or capture should always be indicated by means of special descriptions (lit. poetical passages) and the Introductory Scenes will refer to such incidents (lit. acts). (Ghosh 1950: 358)

There is undeniably an admixture of pleasant and unpleasant events in the list given, as items such as marriage, commencement of a miracle, etc. also figure here along with violent events, but the accent is evidently on disturbing things such as graphic presentation of death, battle and siege of a city. This reservation towards violence indicated in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is in fact matched by actual practice in the case of the majority of playwrights who usually shy away from direct depiction of violent scenes in their plays.

However, it is intriguing that if, in fact, this passage clearly prohibited direct presentation of certain violent and unpleasant events on the stage in some types of plays, an opposite perception was equally widespread regarding this matter, for the very same passage of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* had a diametrically opposite and well established iteration, accepted by Abhinavagupta in his commentary on the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

In Abhinavagupta's version, the passage quoted above does not have any negative particle in the first sentence and accordingly, it would mean exactly the opposite:

> *krodhaprasādaśokāḥ śāpopasargo 'tha vidravodvāhau adbhutasambhavadarśanamanke pratyakṣajānisyuḥ* | (Ramakrishnakavi 1934: 419; *Abhinavabhāratī*).
>
> Feats of anger, favour, grief, pronouncing a curse, running away, marriage, commencement of some miracle, and its actual appearance, should be directly visible in an act.

Moreover, Abhinavagupta describes these items as 'entertaining' (*rañjaka*),[2] thus undoing the very concept behind the alleged prohibition of certain type of events on the stage.

Thus we are faced with two contradictory precepts which have the *Nāṭyaśāstra* backing. However, a closer perusal of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* itself would indicate that despite prohibition of direct depiction of acts of violence and scenes of death in an act of the *nāṭaka,* the treatise envisages an uninhibited portrayal of violence on the stage as the description of the very first performance, quoted in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* itself, would indicate. What presents itself to the actors entrusted with the task of enacting that first performance is not a serene play with lofty ideals of renunciation or a love play depicting contours of love in its varying phases as dramatized by playwrights like Kālidāsa. According to the treatise, the performance selected for the first presentation was

> a re-enactment of the situation in which the demons (*daityas*) were defeated by the gods which represented (sometimes) altercation and tumult and [sometimes] mutual cutting off and piercing [of limbs or bodies]. (Ghosh 1950: 9)

[2] *iti etac cāpirañjakasyopalakṣaṇam* (Ramakrishnakavi 1934: 419; *Abhinavabhāratī*).

From this, it would have been clear that the *Nāṭyaśastra* was aware of the intense dramatic effect of such a violence on the stage and the deep psychological involvment of the audience in the depiction of such scenes. Interestingly, we see this violence enacted on the stage spreading outside it as well, with the demons disrupting the show and Indra smashing their bodies with a flagstaff known as *jarjara.*

The readiness with which the *Nāṭyaśāstra* accommodates violence as an aspect of its vision of life is concomitant with its comprehensive aesthetics in which a wide spectrum of emotions, including fury and valour, figure as well. It is possible that even while prohibiting violence in the *nāṭaka*, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* did not extend this restriction to other types of plays. The definition seen in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of the many types of plays like the *vyāyoga*, the *ḍima* and the *samavakāra* involving violent incidents reinforce this perspective. In the *vyāyoga*, there should be a battle, personal combat, challenge and angry conflict (*ibid*.: 370). The *ḍima* should contain items like an earthquake, fall of meteors, eclipse of the sun and the moon, battle, personal combat, challenge, and furious conflict (*ibid*.). Violent scenes are profuse in the *samavakāra* type of play as well, in which excitement (*vidrava*) caused by many factors including battle and siege of a city figure prominently. The description of the contours of *raudra rasa*, like its determinants (*vibhāva*), consequents (*anubhāva*) and concomitant states (*vyabhicāribhāva*), contains a lot of violent situations like "beating, breaking, crushing, cutting, piercing, taking up arms, hurling of missiles, fighting, drawing of blood, and the like" (*ibid*.: 113). A perusal of the first chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* shows that the plays enacted initially were of a violent nature and the delicate style of Kaiśikī was added later (*ibid*.: 367).

In this connection, the relation between the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the epic tradition of India needs to be closely looked into. It may be noted that both the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* are essentially war stories and the image of a great war figures prominently in them. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* itself time and again reiterates its intimate relation with the *itihāsa*. Thus, in the genesis story, according to the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Brahmā declares that he is going to make a fifth Veda of the *nāṭya*

with the *itihāsa* (Ramakrishnakavi 1956: 13). After the creation of the *nāṭya*, he reiterates that the *itihāsa* has been created by him. Though Manmohan Ghosh translates the *itihāsa* in a general way, as "semi-historical tales", he concedes that as per tradition, it may refer specifically to the *Mahābhārata.* Actually, the *itihāsa* in Indian tradition refers to both the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* and both these epics were intimately connected with the dramatic tradition. Indeed, the plot of many plays is mainly taken from both these epics and this holds true in the case of many other types of plays, too. As is well known, both the epics are, among many other things, war tales and the wars fought in both the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* are perennial sources of stories for later dramatists. Importantly, there is a preponderance of violent scenes in them, when, for example, we compare them with plays based on Buddhist motifs which generally favour the serene mode of life.

Against this backdrop, a close analysis of the traditional repertoire of the Kūṭiyāṭṭam theatre of Kerala plays will be extremely interesting. Plays with predominantly violent incidents figure prominently here in comparison with plays depicting the gentler aspects of life. An interesting case study in this regard is the text of Śaktibhadra's *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi* and its representation on the Kūṭiyāṭṭam stage. The second act of the play presents the demoness Śūrpaṇakhā disguised as a beautiful damsel determined to seduce Rāma, and if this does not work, at least Lakṣmaṇa. On being approached for the second time, Rāma, revealing that he is already married to Sītā, pleads his helplessness; she then decides to approach Lakṣmaṇa for the second time as suggested by Rāma and she also resolves to show her true form if she is again rejected. She is indeed rejected, and Rāma, taken by surprise by Śūrpaṇakhā's dreadful appearance, asks Lakṣmaṇa:

> Lakṣmaṇa, what is this?
> With terrible canine teeth, red hair standing upright, with a body like a mountain and dark as a cloud', this uncontrollable form strikes fear even in me who killed Tāṭakā. (Jones and Raghavan 1984: 38)

Śūrpaṇakhā decides to eat the flesh of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, and to offer Sītā as a present to Rāvaṇa. She carries away Lakṣmaṇa up to the sky, much to the consternation of Rāma who feels helpless at the sudden turn of events. But suddenly, he feels something like an earthquake. On looking closely, he finds a thick flow of liquid resembling gushing rivulet, thick with minerals of the mountain and the red glow of the rising sun, seeping down from a thick cloud. Actually it is the blood of the terrible Śūrpaṇakhā whose ears and nose have been cut off by Lakṣmaṇa who emerges unscathed from her grip. She threatens both Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa with dire consequences for their misdeeds and decides to approach Khara and Dūṣaṇa to seek their help in implementing her revengeful scheme.

In the Kūṭiyāṭṭam performance, this segment is known as *Śūrpaṇakhānka* and it takes about six hours to enact it. The three main scenes comprising it are: the entrance of Śūrpaṇakhā as a beautiful damsel named Lalitā; the fight between Lakṣmaṇa and Śūrpaṇakhā; and finally, the bloody scene called *niṇam* (blood) in which the wounded Śūrpaṇakhā comes onto the stage. An interesting feature of this act is that while the role of Śūrpaṇakhā in her beautiful appearance is assigned to an actress as is wont in the tradition, in her terrible form as a demoness, her role is taken up by a male actor probably to enhance the terrible nature of the change she undergoes. A close examination of the costume and makeup used for the act reveals that considerable measures are taken to highlight both the violent and the comic aspects of the character. The face and body are blackened. The five trident marks on the face, made of white pigments which stands out on the dark countenance, have a bizarre effect. The false breasts are made either of leather or the outer covering of the leaf of the areca nut tree. The ear ornaments are made of palm frond like that of the madman in *Pratijñāyaugandharāyaṇa.* The hair is fashioned out of a type of grass called *ñoṅṅaṇṇam*, and it is worn with a band called *vāsikam.* At the forehead a red cloth is tied and another head band decorated with peacock feather. A garland of twisted cloth suggesting a skull garland is donned in the place of a garland made of garlic worn by Śūrpaṇakhā in normal circumstances. The acting manual of the play insists that

both the drumming in the background and the acting on the scene are to be very vigorous (Jones and Raghavan 1984: 111–112). The character, its teeth protruding and eyes staring wildly, enters the stage at a run, jumping and spinning around, and shouting loudly. The character speaks a degenerate form of Malayalam caricaturing the dialect spoken by the underprivileged social groups of Kerala.

It is true that, in tune with the general practice in Sanskrit drama, the actual scene of combat is not described in the play or shown in the on-stage performance. However, the aftermath of the violence, featuring Śūrpaṇakhā roaring in anger and pain after Lakṣmaṇa had cut off her body parts, is actually shown on the stage which creates a haunting impression on the audience. The final scene featuring the entrance of Śūrpaṇakhā soaked in blood is indeed terrifying. The wounded Śūrpaṇakhā, whose ears, nose and breasts have been cut off and are hanging loosely; whose inner stomach and arteries are exposed and entangled into one big, gruesome mess; and from whose nose, mouth and chest blood is seen oozing, presents a horrifying picture.

In order to further heighten the overall effect, it is through the audience space that Śūrpaṇakhā enters the stage. This is in sharp contrast with the normal practice of a character entering from the space behind the stage. An awestruck audience finds her suddenly in their midst, wailing terribly, hooting, and cursing, falling down and standing up, kicking and hurling abuses, bathed in blood. Her entrance is accompanied by lighted torches, which are occasionally inflamed when some powder is thrown on them (*ibid*.: 71). Sudha Gopalakrishnan evokes the overall effect of the scene thus:

> The slow approach of the red-spattered ogress wailing loudly with faltering steps, through the midst of the audience, to the accompaniment of torches and loud drumming, creates the impression of heavy bleeding and tortuous pain, evoking both awe and revulsion in the mind of the spectator. (Gopalakrishnan 2011: 84–85)

To depict the blood-stained Śūrpaṇakhā, a liquid called *niṇam* is specially made using a boiled solution made of rice powder, turmeric

powder and quicklime to which are added plantain and roasted rice (Chakyar 1996: 15). In the play, only the nose and the ears of Śūrpaṇakhā are mentioned as being cut off;[3] but on the stage, even her breasts are shown as having been mutilated, magnifying violent nature of the scene. Interestingly, this innovation specific to the Kerala stage is severely criticised by the anonymous author of *Naṭāṅkuśa* who points out that Śūrpaṇakhā is displayed here with her breasts chopped off which is against the original text of the play and the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself.[4] K. P. Narayana Pisharoti suggests that this innovation is based on the version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* found in the *Adhyātmarāmāyaṇa* and *Bhārata* of Tuñcatt Eḷuttachan. Needless to say, the entrance of Śūrpaṇakhā through the audience is designed to enhance the dramatic effect of the scene and to expand its impact.

It is significant that the performances were mostly enacted during the night, both in the case of Kathakaḷi and Kūṭiyāṭṭam. Nocturnal environment seems to have escalated the sense of dark mystery and in the case of violent scenes, the horror evoked by the presentation. In the days when electricity or other artificial lighting systems were unknown, the circular range of light emitted by lamps and torches focused on the face of the actor and obliterated the sight of the background and drummers (Narayanan 2022: 90). However, there is a conflagration in the atmosphere when the blood-dripping form of Śūrpaṇakhā enters the stage through the audience accompanied by several torch bearers whose lighted torches flare up when some powder is occasionally thrown on them. The scene acquires intense dramatic effect when the roaring Śūrpaṇakhā, standing in front of the audience, accosts the stunned Rāma, accompanied by Lakṣmaṇa and

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3 *nyastam astram niśācaryāḥ kathañcit karṇanāsike* (Jones and Raghavan 1984: 194).

4 *api ca yatśūrpaṇakhāṅke śūrpaṇakhā vai rūpyakṛtautasyāḥ stanadvayasamchedanam api āhāryeṇa vitanyate tasya kim nāma mūlam bhavet | na khalu nāṭakam tatra khalu*
nyastam astram niśācaryāḥ kathañcit karṇanāsike ity etāvad evoktam | ārṣepi ity ukto lakṣmaṇas tasyāḥ kruddho rāmasya paśyataḥ | uddhṛtya khadgam cicheda karṇamāsam mahātmanaḥ ity evāsti. tasmāt svayamkṛtam edevam. Paulose 1993: 48–49. Cf. Warder 1988: 10.

Sītā, all three startled by the sudden change of the form of the demoness. Professor K. T. Ramavarma, a noted connoisseur of Kūṭiyāṭṭam, recounts his experience as a child in Tripunithura when he witnessed the performance of Chachu Chakyar, a celebrated actor, donning the guise of Śūrpaṇakhā:

> The entrance of Chachu Chakyar featuring the blood soaked Śūrpaṇakhā created a feeling of supernatural awe in me. I can remember only with a shudder the image of Śūrpaṇakhā with tender coconut pieces soaked in red liquid of *kuruti* hanging on all the parts of the body, the odious face, the staggering gait with pauses in the middle, the frequent falls, the pitiful cries coming from the face, and the delirious utterings. Frightened to the core, I cried aloud on seeing that entrance of Śūrpaṇakhā. (Ramavarma 1981: 36)

A puzzling aspect of the depiction of this violent scene is the comic touch inherent in the representation of Śūrpaṇakhā on the stage and which derives mainly from her speech. Narayana Pisharoti, who refers to this aspect for the first time, says that "Śūrpaṇakhā is presented on the stage in a manner which is slightly mixed with humour" (Narayana Pisharoti 2002: 69). She uses a degraded form of Malayalam and even when she narrates the death of her husband, the comic effect is not altogether absent. There is what Narayana Pisharoti describes as the *udghaṭṭana* type of recitation accompanied by rhythmic jumps and claps of hands. There is a comic touch even in the fatal fight between Bālin and Sugrīva, where actors imitate the behaviour of the monkeys. This type of comic relief probably enhances the bizarre effect of the scenes. Another interesting feature of the *Śūrpaṇakhāṅka* episode is the ritualistic aura it acquires when staged in the Vennimala temple of Kottayam district, Kerala, where Lakṣmaṇa is the principal deity. Here, there is no actor representing Lakṣmaṇa. The belief is that the deity himself assumes the role. Consequently, the scene depicting the cutting of the breasts and the nose of Śūrpaṇakhā is symbolically presented near the *sanctum sanctorum,* in the presence of the idol (Rajendran 1989: 10).

Violence and death are depicted uninhibitedly in many other scenes of *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi* and other plays as well. These include the fight between Rāvaṇa and Jaṭāyu and the latter's death enacted in the scene of *Jaṭāyuvadha*; the fight between Bālin and Sugrīva and the former's death caused by the arrow of Rāma in *Bālivadhāṅka* of *Abhiṣeka;* and the death of Cāṇūra, Muṣṭika and Kaṃsa in *Bālacarita.* Probably one of the most poignant depictions of violence followed by death is the fratricidal battle between Bālin and Sugrīva in the enactment of *Abhiṣeka* ascribed to Bhāsa. Bālin in his fighting mood presents a terrible sight. Technically, his costume is called *cuvannatāṭi*. In the ensuing scene where Bālin, who is angry at the call for fight from Sugrīva, huge *kuttuvilakku* type of lamps are filled with lighted wicks on the left and right side of the stage (Narayana Pisharoti 2002: 42–43). Suddenly there is a loud thud in the green room, followed by a stern demand to know the whereabouts of Sugrīva. Meanwhile, in the midst of the inflamed lamps, there emerges a terribly furious figure removing the curtain. He revolves his wide eyes, has reddened face and trembling lips, and biting his curved teeth he roars aloud. He hits his thighs and shakes his bottom. The entrance is followed by a prolonged fight involving many types of jumps, flights, and combat postures. The fighting comes to a sudden end when the winning Bālin is shot by an arrow from Rāma hiding behind. The unexpected arrow clandestinely shot by Rāma brings to the forefront disturbing ethical questions which are voiced by Bālin himself in his dying moments. Bālin becomes a tragic hero in his dying moment, bequeathing his inherited necklace to a repentant Sugrīva and blessing him, while his wife Tārā looks on weeping inconsolably. The act of dying is presented with great realistic details, using methods of breath-control to uncanny effect. According to Ammannur Madhava Chakyar, a well-known Kūṭiyāṭṭam actor, this is one of the most demanding and challenging scenes, and a true measure of an actor's ability, since the representation of dying on the stage is difficult to portray. The actor had to master breathing techniques "to make the death-throes realistic." He once pointed out in a personal communication that among all the scenes in Kūṭiyāṭṭam plays, the scene depicting the death of Bālin "has the greatest popularity" (Sullivan 2007: 423).

The preparation for battle and the actual fight is technically known as *paṭappurappāṭu* in Malayalam. Even though it cannot be realistically enacted on the stage due to technical difficulties, it is enacted solo by the actor when recounting the battles. A typical description of *paṭappurappāṭu*, resembling that shown by the character Śaṅkukarṇa, consists of all the preparatory items of the four-fold ancient Indian army like the individual soldiers coming in line and tightening their body, wearing coat and protective shield, taking up arms after saluting them and the movement of elephants, and horses (Narayana Pisharoti 2002: 52). There are also graphic narrations of scenes like hunting whenever they occur in the plays.

The enactment of violence on stage assumes epic proportions in Kathakaḷi, which in a way is a continuation of the Kūṭiyāṭṭam tradition. In Kathakaḷi, more than in Kūṭiyāṭṭam, epic stories derived from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and, more prominently, from the *Mahābhārata*, form the kernel of the stories dramatized. Medieval Kerala celebrated the exploits of great mythological figures through Kathakaḷi. The intimate connection between Kathakaḷi and ancient martial arts like Kaḷaripayaṟṟu is revealed by the dexterity with which violent battle scenes were presented on the stage. A cursory glance at the very titles of Kathakaḷi plays derived from the epics will reveal their predominantly violent nature. They typically end in the word *vadha* indicating the slaying of the concerned character. Such titles include *Duryodhanavadha, Bālivadha, Kīcakavadha, Narakāsuravadha, Nivātakavacakālakeyavadha* and so on. To take up an example, the killing of Duśśāsana in the play of *Duryodhanavadha* is one of the most violent scenes in Kathakaḷi, much sought after by the audience. Phillip Zarrilli remarks that the scene wherein the gruesome killing of Duśśāsana by Raudra Bhīma is enacted projects Bhīma in his most terrifying form. Here the actor ritualistically and realistically disembowels Duśśāsana when he has killed him. The actor representing Bhīma hides cloth resembling entrails and blood

> until, at the climactic moment, as the drummers [are] creating a din of sound, he dips his hands into the victim's stomach and literally mimes eating his victim's entrails by dipping his head down to the victim's stomach.

> At this moment, the performer brings out the cloth entrails and blood. The actor then raises his head from the victim displaying for the audience his bloodied hands, the entrails streaming from his mouth. (Zarrilli 1984: 45)

Zarrilli notes that "in the staging of the battle between the forces of good and evil we discover a long performance and literary heritage in Kerala which gives graphic life to gory and bloody spectacles" (*ibid*.: 43). He refers to the gory scenes in Kathakaḷi like the disembowelment of evil characters such as Duśśāsana and Hiraṇyakaśipu and traces their origin to folk ritual and regional literary tradition of Kerala. His account of the disembowelment scene involving Raudra-Bhīma (Bhīma the Furious) and Narasiṃha reminds one of the gory scenes of Śūrpaṇakhā in *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi* in their uninhibited portrayal of violence. Zarrilli refers to the account given by Iyer of the dark demoness "all black, streaming with blood, howling in pain and rage, emerging from the darkness of the night", and maintains that it is the fulfilment of Artraud's vision of the theatre of cruelty (*ibid*.: 6). From all this, we can surmise that in the presentation of classical drama, Kerala theatre was oblivious of any taboo attached to the depiction of violent scenes like fights and the brutal act of killing. Rather, they were celebrated with gusto and the audience seemed to have enjoyed such scenes.

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The Landscape of the Battlefield
The Case of *Varadāmbikāpariṇaya-Campū* by Tirumalāmbā*

ABSTRACT: The article presents an in-depth analysis of the description of the battlefield found in the poem *Varadāmbikāpariṇaya* or "The Marriage of Varadāmbikā," composed in verse and prose (*campū*) by Tirumalāmbā, a poetess active at Acyutadevarāya's court, and most likely his wife. The detailed accounts of war campaigns, with depictions of marching troops and battles, concern the figure of Acyutadevarāya's father, Narasa Nāyaka, whom the authoress calls King Narasiṃha. The verbal portrayal of the battle against the Chola ruler is particularly striking. It is unlikely to find in other works of *kāvya* literary tradition a similarly dazzling compilation of images painting a word picture of the battleground by means of objects and situations belonging to a sphere of human life so different from the deadly combat.

KEYWORDS: *Varadāmbikāpariṇaya-campū*, Tirumalāmbā, Acyutadevarāya, Narasa Nāyaka, Tuḷuva dynasty, Vijayanagara, *kāvya* literature

* I thank the reviewer of this article for all the comments.

Introduction

The present paper will look at the descriptive fragments found in the *campū* or the poem in verse and in prose, and in particular, the description of the battlefield, which will be analysed in detail. As I have already mentioned elsewhere (Sudyka 2023b), the research on the *campū*s is not particularly advanced and even the theoreticians of Sanskrit literature of the past did not devote much space to discussing the nature of this particular literary genre.

In my recent article (*ibid*.), I have highlighted various ways in which the *campū* text may be organized, such as the division into chapters called *ucchvāsa* or *āśvāsa*, but there are also certain other possibilities to structure the contents. We do find *campū*s divided into *stabaka*s, *vilāsa*s/*ullāsa*s and *kāṇḍa*s. Even the term *sarga*, seemingly reserved for an epic poem in verse or *padyamahākāvya*, very often called *sargabandha*, is used by some *campū* authors. Another possible division of a *campū* text would be into *varṇya*s, that is descriptions (lit. "to be described," "what is worth describing"). The latter term is of particular importance in the study of *campūs*, including this paper. Even if there were no internal divisions in the text at all, the descriptions prove to play a crucial role in any long poem. Sometimes it even seems as if the plot is there only to allow the author to weave more descriptive passages into it, just like pearls (Skt. *mauktika*, *muktā*) are woven onto a string to make a necklace. In fact, the beginnings of *kāvya* poetry may be linked to short poems such as *muktaka*s or single-verse poems complete in themselves; those, loosely bound by a theme, began with time to form larger distinct wholes (Lienhard 1984: 63–67).

Early theorists of Sanskrit literature emphasise the importance of the presence of descriptions of diverse nature in literary compositions. They do so when defining the *sargabandha mahākāvya*, i.e., the court poem written in verse, but the same recommendations would apply to narrative works composed in prose and a mixture of verse and prose, i.e., the *campū*s. One could say of those works that they contain collections of ornate descriptions, but the descriptions themselves act, in

turn, as showcases for an array of most precious or spectacular things. In her study of *mahākāvya*s, Ariadna Matyszkiewicz pays special attention to descriptions of mountains and oceans found in Sanskrit grand narratives[1] and writes:

> *Mahākāvya* poets highlight the natural grandeur of mountains and oceans, but only in order to tame it by incorporating into the collection of most precious and astounding things in the world. Within that collection, grand natural objects are turned into most unnatural, highly refined, ornate entities. (Matyszkiewicz 2018: 72)

Her insights hold true not only for the *sargabandha mahākāvya* genre but a wider range of texts as well as descriptions of more than just natural objects such as mountains and oceans. Those could also be "great battles and other momentous events, deeds, objects, and characters, which serve as landmarks of Sanskrit grand narratives" (Matyszkiewicz 2021: 32).

Daṇḍin (7/8 century CE), one of the many literary theorists who discuss the genre determinants of the *mahākāvya*, provides a list of descriptions the poets should include in their works:

> Daṇḍin, Kād. 1.16–17[2]
> (...) the *mahākāvya* (...) is ornamented with descriptions of: a city, the ocean, a mountain, seasons, moonrise, sunrise; play in a garden, play in water, drinking wine, the delights of love-making; separations of lovers and weddings, the birth / the growing up of sons; and also a council, [the dispatch of] an envoy, a march [of an army], a battle, the triumph of the hero (…) (transl. Trynkowska 2000: 40)

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1 See: Matyszkiewicz 2018, Matyszkiewicz 2019, and Matyszkiewicz 2021.

2 *nagarārṇavaśailartucandrārkodayavarṇanaiḥ |*
udyānasalilakrīḍāmadhupānaratotsavaiḥ ||
vipralambhair vivāhaiś ca kumārodayavarṇanaiḥ |
mantradūtaprayāṇājināyakābhyudayair api ||
alaṃkṛtam […] |

Among the items listed, besides themes connected with love, we also find a sequence related to war, and therefore violence, and since the marching out of the army is mentioned, it is clear that the next step on this path is very likely to be a battle. Of course, this particular requirement is also valid in the case of *gadya* or prose poems, and *campū kāvya*s or mixed poems, even if theoreticians of literature are silent on the subject, the lacuna being basically due to the conceptual priority and domination of *sargabandha mahākāvya* in theoretical reflections. However, one needs to keep in mind that mixed prose and verse compositions, already evidenced in the Ṛgvedic dialogue hymns and in the early post-Ṛgvedic texts (Witzel 1997), developed eventually into "prosimetric poetry on the *mahākāvya* scale" (Jones 2018: 103). This, in turn, advanced the possibility, and even the obligation, to comply with certain recommendations specific for all *mahākāvya*s.

Narasa Nāyaka's *"digvijaya"*

The *Varadāmbikāpariṇaya-campū*, the text with which we are concerned here, was written by Tirumalāmbā, a poetess at the court of Acyutadevarāya, king of the Tuḷuva dynasty, who ruled the Vijayanagara Empire between 1529 and 1542. It is likely Tirumalāmbā became one of his wives if we agree that a certain Ōduva Tirumalaidēvi, who is mentioned in the Srirangam inscription (EI 1942: 285–290), is the same person as our poetess (Sudyka 2023a: 607). Varadāmbikā, whose name appears in the title under which the work is known, was the daughter of the Salaga chief and the senior queen of Acyutadevarāya. The second part of Tirumalāmbā's work, indeed, describes the love story of Acyuta and the Salaga princess, but the first part is devoted to another male protagonist, namely Acyuta's father, Narasa Nāyaka, introduced here as King Narasiṃha. The possible reason for such a narrative construction was to legitimise Acyuta's rule. It can be hypothesised that Tirumalāmbā's *campū*, functioning in a specific courtly context, was a well-thought-out, subtle component in the practical implementation of imperial politics (Sudyka 2023a). So, indeed, it does not really matter

that both parts of the text focus on different protagonists: the glory of the father's military superiority is passed on directly to Acyuta, the son, as if two of Acyuta's half-brothers[3] had not occupied the throne in-between. Also, the deeds of both Narasa and Acyuta contribute in equal measure to the wealth and glory of the Tuḷuva dynasty, only in two different spheres of human life. Thus, the first part of the poem is devoted to Narasa's military activities, while the second part describes Acyuta falling in love at first sight with Varadāmbikā, how he pines for her before experiencing conjugal bliss, followed by Varadāmbikā's subsequent pregnancy and birth of the heir to the dynasty—Venkaṭādri.

The hero of the first part, Narasa Nāyaka, began his career as a general of King Sāḷuva Narasiṃha and became the regent after the king's death in 1491. When Narasa Nāyaka died, in 1503, his position was taken over by his eldest son, Vīra Narasiṃha, who in 1505 inaugurated the new Tuḷuva dynasty on the Vijayanagara throne. There is no record of Narasa Nāyaka's coronation, but Tirumalāmbā speaks of him as the king of Vijayanagara and describes his successful campaigns. There can be no doubt about his military exploits which are recorded in inscriptions and various literary sources. Yet, the dates and details of his life and related events are not always easy to ascertain from the sources available to us and it is quite difficult to reconstruct the history of his regency (Michell 2013: 407). From Tirumalāmbā's account one can clearly see that her 'report' was intentionally styled as Narasa's *digvijaya*, the conquest of the four quarters of the world, or of lands extending in all cardinal directions;[4] accordingly, the victories

[3] These were Vīra Narasiṃha (r. 1505–1509) and the famous Kṛṣṇadevarāya (r. 1509–1529).

[4] The poetess announces metaphorically Narasa's expedition in these words:

> VP-C 16
> *haridvadhūr ātmaguṇānurāgiṇīr anugrahīṣyann akhilāḥ karagrahāt |*
> *prahitya dūtim iva kīrtim agrato vibhuḥ pratasthe vijayādaracchalāt ||*
>
> Treating with respect the directions of the world, his brides, who were captivated by his qualities, the ruler, in order to take them as wives, first sent a messenger—his fame and then, on the pretext of honouring Victory, set out.

in the east, south and west are narrated as having occurred in a direct sequence, one after another. However, his expedition to the east is described in a very cursory manner,[5] which reinforces our belief that the idea here was not to present the events in their historical order, but to elevate Narasa's military conquests and view them in terms of *pradakṣiṇa*. Starting in the east, he would thus be circumambulating the nucleus of his kingdom by imitating the auspicious journey of the sun while, of course, visiting major pilgrimage centres and offering rich gifts to the temples.[6]

What we know for a fact is that around year 1497 Narasa marched south with the purpose of re-subjugating the territories which were once controlled by Vijayanagara. After successful conquests there,[7] he attacked and took over Srirangapattana, then continued his march in the westerly direction reaching Gokarna on the coast of the Arabian Sea; sometime in 1497 he returned from this campaign, which although long and extensive did not take him to the north and the east. The conquest of the Raichur Doab, which could be treated as an expedition to the north, occurred earlier, in 1492–1493, and the conflict with the Gajapati ruler happened towards the end of his regency (Nilakanta Sastri 1955: 264–265). Suryakanta, the editor and translator of the *Varadāmbikāpariṇaya-campū*, suggests that Narasa's war expedition to the east should be, in fact, identified with his father Īśvara's military operations. He explains: "Both of them were the subordinates of the

[5] VP-C 17
ādau jitvā harihayadiśām ātmasātkṛtya śaktyā
tatrātyugraṃ dinakaram iva sthāpayitvā pratāpam |
kṣoṇīpālaḥ prathamajaladheḥ kūlamārgeṇa gatvā
pārāvārantaraghanacamūpaṅktir āgād avācīm ||

The king first conquered the eastern side of the world, making it his own through his regal power. There he established his own glory fierce as the sun. Then, with his compact army excelling the ocean, he travelled the road by the sea and reached the south.

[6] On the military expedition of King Acyuta having actually the form of a pilgrimage, see Sudyka 2013.

[7] He subjugated the territories up to the Cape Comorin (Nilakanta Sastri 1955: 264).

Emperor Sāḷuva Narasiṁha during his war against the Oriya king Kapileśvara who had conquered some portions of the Vijayanagara Empire in the north-east" (Suryakanta 1970: 168–169).

It is very likely that Narasa, as a matter of fact, had participated in the eastern expedition in the army commanded by his father, Īśvara. We know that Īśvara trained him in the art of combat and commanding troops. After Īśvara's death, his son was the natural candidate for the position of commander-in-chief of the Sāḷuva Narasiṃha's forces and, indeed, became one (Hymavathi 1994: 39).

However, it must be remembered that the capture of Udayagiri fort by the general Īśvara mentioned in the *Varāhapurāṇam*, a Telugu poem written by two poets, Nandi Mallayya and Ghanṭa Singayya, took place around 1470 (*ibid.*: 37; Aiyangar 2003: 87–90) and may not be credited to Īśvara's son, Narasa. Moreover, this victory consolidated the supremacy of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha and it was Sāḷuva Narasiṃha who ordered his trustworthy general Īśvara to proceed with the conquest. Thus, it must be recognised that the conquest of the four quarters of the world was not a one-time feat carried out by Narasa. It spanned decades, during which Narasa's position changed from that of a general to that of a self-governing regent; however, the authoress has neatly linked Narasa's many victories, forming a vision of a victorious march of armies under his command to the east, south, west and north. It was certainly a good propaganda move and in keeping with literary convention as far as creating the image of a victorious and noble hero is concerned.

Scenes from the battlefield

In Tirumalāmbā's narrative, the most prominent of Narasa's enemies is the Chola ruler, and the battle against him is described with grandeur, using whole range of images and various literary devices. It is not certain who, in fact, this Chola ruler was, as such a designation could have disguised any one of the governors of the Chola territories.

Nevertheless, fighting against this enemy provides an opportunity to present the five-element political-military sequence: meeting, dispatch of an envoy, march of troops, battle, victory of the protagonist (*mantra-dūta-prayāṇa-āji-nāyakābhyudaya*) recommended to the *mahākāvya* poets in theoretical treatises.

The description of the battle starts with a council of war held in both camps, that of the Chola ruler and Narasa Nāyaka. In this particular case, Narasa's widespread fame as a warrior may be seen as a substitute for the dispatch of an actual messenger.[8] We witness the Chola ruler's advisers speaking of Narasa's victories and suggesting that he surrenders to his opponent. But their advice is not heeded by their lord. Narasa, on the other hand, is depicted as a man who is confident of his superior battle skills and we see him telling the ministers gathered at his side (*pārśvagatān amātyān*), with a smile:

yoddhuṃ prayāma vayam apy ucitaṃ kileti || VP-C 22d ||

"It is indeed appropriate that we march out to fight."

There is no account of a response to this declaration of confidence other than descriptions of the troops preparing for the march. Finally, the Vijayanagara army marches into battle. War drums and the praises of bards are heard, clouds of dust are raised. The deadly combat begins.

And here we come to the crux of the matter, which is the description of the battle and the battlefield itself in the *kāvya* tradition, and what innovations, if any, Tirumalāmbā brings to the subject. Of course, in epic poems such as this, we, too, encounter familiar images known from heroic tales and present in earlier literature, e.g., the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, such as sightings of headless warriors, jackals and vultures feeding on the battlefield, demons feasting on blood and flesh of the fallen, dead horses and elephants, the pearls spilling from the

[8] Usually not all elements of the political-military sequence are present in the *mahākāvya*, and sometimes some are substituted by other devices. See more in Sudyka 2003.

dissected temples of elephants, *apsaras*es ushering slain heroes into heaven. Images like these evoke emotional reactions such as fear and disgust, but also admiration for the valour of the warriors. Besides the presence of these motifs, one can observe how the *mahākāvya* authors bring into play their routine practice of building up their descriptions by masterfully employing a whole series of elements to illustrate the size, the power, and the enormity of the entities and phenomena described. Such mechanisms, which are particularly evident in depictions of oceans and mountains as we already know, are however by no means absent in other descriptions.

In the case of magnificent natural objects, the elements assembled for presentation serve to increase admiration and awe, but while presenting a battlefield such a literary practice usually amplifies the emotions of fear and disgust. Collections[9] of this kind, often present in descriptions of battles, also enumerate various omens foretelling the defeat of one opponent and the victory of the other. A good example of this would be the *Bhaṭṭikāvya* or "The Poem of Bhaṭṭi",[10] where such images constantly appear in the narrative of the Laṅkā war in canto 14 and 17.[11]

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[9] More about the pattern of collection in Sanskrit intellectual and literary culture in Matyszkiewicz 2019: 75–79.

[10] It is no coincidence that the *Bhaṭṭikāvya* otherwise known as the *Rāvaṇavadha*, the *sargabandha mahākāvya* written by Bhaṭṭi around the 7th century CE, was chosen here as a source material. Not only does it contain several longer chapters (*sarga*) recounting the battle of Laṅkā, but it also belongs to the classical literary production of the first millennium, and among texts of that period, it has been recognised as one of the six *mahākāvya*s considered by some critics to be the greatest achievements within the genre. Therefore, this epic poem can provide an excellent background for a work written by a woman in the second millennium CE, when the dynamics and role of works written in Sanskrit are changing (Bronner and Shulman 2006).

[11] E.g.: Bhk 14.20
dadāla bhūr nabho raktaṃ goṣpadapraṃ vavarṣa ca |
mṛgāḥ prasasṛpur vāmaṃ khagāś cukuvire 'śubham ||

The earth split, the sky rained blood enough to fill the hoof print of a cow, deer passed by on the left, birds called inauspiciously (transl. Fallon 2009: 325).

Let us take a look at some images intrinsic to the description of the battlefield—for instance, the image of flowing blood. Turning again to the *Bhaṭṭikāvya*, we find numerous references to rivers of blood streaming from the bodies of slain or wounded animals and humans. Blood gushing from the wounds of the dead and injured is depicted in various ways. Wounded warriors vomit blood. The sky, too, rains blood. The ground of the battlefield consequently turns into a red swamp. At times, we are made to view the frightening scenes of bloodshed through the prism of conventional descriptions of other phenomena.

Bhk 14.27
saṃbabhūvuḥ kabandhāni prohuḥ śoṇitatoyagāḥ |
terur bhaṭāsya-padmāni dhvajaiḥ pheṇair ivābabhe ||

Headless trunks appeared, rivers of blood carried them, the lotus faces of soldiers passed by, banners shone like foam. (transl. Fallon 2009: 325)

The rivers are portrayed as adorned with lotuses, as they normally are in the proper season of the year, but now it is the lotuses of human faces, and instead of water, it is blood flowing down the river, its foam imitated by battle flags bobbing up and down with the waves. The use of the *āsya-padma* metaphor, normally so common in the *kāvya* literature (different synonyms for both face and lotus may be used), here shocks because of the context in which it appears. Examining Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita* and *Saundarananda*, Diletta Falqui observes*:*

(…) comparing the warrior faces to the lotus was a *topos* in the epic, which seems to have been imprinted on the Mahākāvya genre and wisely employed by Aśvaghoṣa, later becoming a consecrated image of classical Kāvya. (Falqui 2023: 35)

It is more frequent in the *kāvya* literature to compare women's faces to lotuses, partly because detailed descriptions of female beauty are more common in the *kāvya* poetry, but even though in epic literature it is the faces of warriors that are often equated with lotuses, such an

image of a river of blood with lotuses of warriors' heads floating in it is certainly not a standard stylistic device in either tradition although it does occur.[12] As Ram Karan Sharma states discussing elements of poetry in the *Mahābhārata*, the lotus is "a favorite *upamāna* for anything that is charming" (Sharma 1988: 86). In the case of the Bhk stanza in question and others of such kind, the presence of lotuses does not turn the whole stanza enchanting or make for a more pleasant experience. On the contrary, the dissonance that has now arisen deepens the feeling of horror.

It is true that such descriptions of excruciating battle scenes by means of a completely different reality do occur in Bhaṭṭi's poem as well as in other *kāvya* compositions, but only occasionally. In Tirumalāmbā's *campū*, on the other hand, this is constantly the case.

The section devoted to the description of the battle opens with an extraordinarily long sentence,[13] appended by a series of sentences subordinated to the main clause, which appears at the very end: *atibhayaṅkaraṁ saṁgaram abhūt*—"There took place an extremely terrible battle, [which was…]." The sentences or *upamāna*s for which the battle is *upameya*, describing different situations and aspects of the combat, are introduced before the quoted closing statement. This prose passage is followed by two stanzas: 33 and 34. They are joined by another, two shorter sentences and verse 35, after which another prose fragment appears as a single extended sentence. The section concludes with stanzas 36–39.

The first to appear is a statement equating what happens on the battlefield with the construction of a heavenly palace, the columns of which are formed by the rising rays of flashing swords. And when this palace is all set, celestial women summoned by the war cries appear, casting glances at the heroes. Indra's wife, too, looks at them through the window. The battlefield itself is named in another subordinate

[12] One could point out also other examples, for instance, stanzas 18.72 and 19.77 in the *Śiśupālavadha* of Māgha (Rajendran, C. 2018: 364). For the same reasons as the *Bhaṭṭikāvya*, this epic poem could also serve as a source of interesting stanzas relating to battle and the battlefield.

[13] In the Suryakanta edition it fits on a few pages (Suryakanta 1970: 40–44).

clause; it is styled variously, as "the courtyard of the palace, where the *svayaṃvara* of celestial damsels takes place,"[14] "a laying-in-chamber for the goddess of Victory,"[15] or "the dining hall of Yama."[16] Furthermore, we are told that what happens on the battlefield resembles a complicated game of chess (Suryakanta 1970: 42).

There is, of course, no shortage of images of blood in the *Varadāmbikāpariṇaya-campū*. The battlefield is compared to a burning forest. The intense fire is red, just like blood, which is also referred to. The severed limbs of the warriors' bodies are respectively the branches, leaves, flowers and fruits with which the ground in this devastated forest—the battlefield—is covered:

> VP-C 34
> *parivahatkṣatajaughapataccamūbhaṭabhujorupadāvayavā mahī |*
> *tatadavāgnigalattaruśākhikāprasavaparṇaphaleva vanī babhau ||*
>
> The earth [of the battlefield], with the arms, thighs, feet and [other] limbs of the soldiers of [both] armies falling in the flowing stream of blood, looked like a forest with branches, flowers, leaves and fruits of trees falling into the spreading forest conflagration.

What we have here is the poetic figure known as the *yathāsaṃkhya* whose essence is the setting forth of two juxtaposed collections of objects "so arranged that item one of the first sequence matches item one of the second, item two of the first matches item two of the second, and so on" (Gerow 1971: 22).

Another complex image the poetess presents us with is the identification of the battlefield with the ocean of heroes' fame fed by the rivers of blood. Rivers always attract elephants. And here, too, those

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[14] *svayaṃvarabhavanāṅgaṇaṁ surāṅgaṇānāṁ* (according to Indian mythology, the heroes who fall in battle are rewarded by *surāṅgaṇā*s/*apsarase*s or celestial females with their embraces; see prose passage before stanza 33; Suryakanta 1970: 43).

[15] *jananasadanaṁ jayendirāyā* (prose passage before stanza 33; Suryakanta 1970: 43).

[16] *āhāramaṇḍapam anīhārakarakumārakasya* (Yama is introduced here as a son of Vivasvat; prose passage before stanza 33; Suryakanta 1970: 43).

powerful animals wade in them, while the shields that have fallen from the warriors' hands bob in the water like turtles. The sight of slaughtered elephants, stranded midstream, and mounted by young demons, broken spears in hand, brings to mind manned rowing boats gliding down the river (Suryakanta 1970: 42–43). Yet another image stages the battlefield as a pleasure-pond (*saṃgara-kelisaras*).[17] Of course, it is all about the enormous amounts of blood that make it up. Elephants dip into it and, instead of lotus-stalks, they pull out the severed limbs of warriors, crush the lotuses of human faces, and eventually the pond is transformed into a curdled mud mixed with flesh and fat.

Warriors, their bodies riddled with arrows, are likened to porcupines (*ibid.*: 41),[18] and those with their swords drawn and raised resemble powerful rhinos (*ibid.*: 43).[19]

The bloodthirsty creatures that are delighted with what is happening are demons, vultures and jackals. However, the authoress uses very complex and astonishing imagery here, too. The daughters of the demons are shown as playing at being cooks: pots are helmets, pearls from elephant

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[17] Prose passage before stanza 36; Suryakanta 1970: 46.

[18] The comparison of warriors, their bodies pierced with arrows, to porcupines is contained in a very long compound word forming a part of an enormous sentence: *sīmādhika-paradhāmālokana-sāmājika-vaimānika-vāmālaka-vimukta-kalpadruma-puṣpa-stabaka-niṣpatita-puṣpandhaya-pakṣa-pavana-tatkṣaṇa-kṛta-sandhukṣaṇa-kopāśuśukṣaṇi-durlakṣya-sādhu-dhānuṣka-kara-pariṣikayāyita-cāpa-cakra-nirgatvara-viśikha-nicaya-khacitāṅga-vīra-vara-varga-samudghāṭita-durlalita-śalya-mṛga-samullasanaṁ* ([The battle had] the beauty of subjugated porcupines displayed by hosts of magnificent warriors with their bodies studded with innumerable arrows, discharged from the circle of bows, serving as ornaments for the hands of skilled bowmen, who are terrible to look at with their fire of anger, fanned into flame that very moment by the breeze of wings of bees dropping from clusters of *kalpadruma* flowers, fallen from the tresses of the assembly of wives of gods, watching the infinite and supreme prowess [of the heroes]) (transl. Suryakanta 1970, modified).

[19] In this part of the sentence, the battlefield is compared to a forest full of herds of rhinoceroses: *kāntāram iva khaḍgikulaparivṛtam*. In Sanskrit, *khaḍgin* means both someone armed with a sword and a rhino, which easily allows for the pun. In this way, the recipients of the poem can imagine groups of warriors on the battlefield with swords drawn, as fearsome as rhinoceroses armed with their horns.

temples[20] are rice, pieces of meat serve as charcoal, the blowpipes used for lighting the fire are pieces of chopped-off elephant trunks.[21] A little swing for the demon's child is made of loops of intestines held at either end by a pair of vultures swaying the rope back and forth (*ibid.:* 42). Such a distorted view of reality could be astonishing.

The most realistic depictions concern the behaviour of the enraged elephants.[22] They stamp their feet on the chests of the warriors and throw their horses into the air. But even in these cases, comparisons

[20] These were *gajamuktā*s believed to originate in the projections of an elephant's forehead.

[21] The prose passage after VP-C 34, first sentence:

niśitatara-kṛpāṇa-nikṛtta-hāstika-mastaka-visrasta-mauktika-jāla-pāṇḍara-taṇḍula-bharitāni kālāyasa-śirastrapātrāṇi pratyagra-tarasa-khaṇḍāṅgāra-saṁgatāyāṁ naistriṁśika-pātra-praghaṭitāṅgāra-dhānyām adhiropya mukhārpita-visṛṣṭa-śuṇḍākhaṇḍa-nalaka-mukha-vahamānaiḥ pavamānaiḥ pātita-saindhava-jaṃghā-kāṇḍendhanaṃ prajvalayantyo rajanicara-kumārikā bālikocita-pāka-kelikām ākalayan |

The daughters of night-rangers placed the pots in the form of iron helmets, full of white rice of a collection of pearls fallen from the frontal globes of elephants, cut down by extremely sharp swords, on the char-coal-burners-with-pots-on in the form of swordsmen. These burners contained live charcoal in the shape of pieces of fresh flesh. And then, by means of winds issuing out of the mouths of blow-pipes of the fallen portions of elephant-trunks, which they (i.e. the daughters of night-rangers) had put to their mouths, they kindled the fuel in the form of the long shanks of horses that had been cut down; and amused themselves with the sport of cooking that becomes young girls (transl. Suryakanta 1970).

[22] A veritable catalogue of possible behaviour of elephants and situations concerning them in battle can be found in the *Siśupālavadha* in *sarga* 18, stanzas 26 to 51, and some more. However, Māgha does not need to juxtapose these with other activities of everyday life not involving elephants to show the cruelty of animals trained for and experienced in battle.

E.g.: ŚV 18.57
paunaḥpunyād asragandhena matto mṛdgan kopāl lokamāyodhanorvyāṃ |
pāde lagnām atra mālām ibhendraḥ pāśīkalpām āyatām ācakarṣa ||

One elephant, intoxicated by the smell of blood, trampling people again and again in the battlefield angrily dragged the string of the intestine stuck to its feet, which was long and which looked like a chaint (transl. Rajendran, C. 2018: 344).

are made with other activities: a game in which human heads are the ball (stanza 36) and tearing a horse apart with a tusk is likened to cutting open a coconut with an axe (stanza 38).[23] One of the elephants rips a soldier apart in the way Bhīma did to Jarāsandha (stanza 39).

The prose and verse passages, discussed briefly above, constitute mainly a description of the battlefield, not the fight itself although words denoting the battle (*saṃgara*, *samara*, *samit*) are employed by the poetess while constructing comparisons and metaphorical juxtapositions with other phenomena. However, in stanza 37 it is clearly indicated that the battlefield [*raṇa* (battle) + *mahi* (earth)] is the object of description. The goddess Kālarātrī feeds from the vessel that the battlefield has become for her.[24] Also in the stanza 39 a word meaning battlefield appears [loc. *raṇabhuvi* = *raṇa* (battle) + *bhū* (earth)].

The climactic moment of the clash, that is, Narasa's entry into battle and the combat with the Chola ruler,[25] is described in separate stanzas and prose passages, just as the preparations for the march and the march of the troops were described earlier. It is only at this point that there the room to develop fully the heroic sentiment (*vīra rasa*) appears, for the description of the battlefield was dominated by sentiment of disgust (*bībhatsa rasa*) and feeling of terror (*bhayānaka rasa*). The accumulated images presented through various literary means serve the purpose of arousing emotions well.

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[23] VP-C 38
vetaṇḍeno vāham ekaṃ karāgrād vikṣipyābhād vyomni dantena bhindan |
vidhyann ūrdhvaṃ vibhrameṇaiva vīro vegotkṣiptaṁ nālikeraṁ kuṭhāryā ||

The elephant threw a horse to the sky with the end of his trunk, pierced it with his tusk and shone like a man who gracefully split in the air a heavily tossed coconut with his axe.

[24] VP-C 37a
raṇamahitalapātre kālarātryā prabhoktryā

[25] About a pattern of a single combat, between individual heroes, and the descriptions of large clashes in the epic tradition as well as in the *Kirātārjunīya* of Bhāravi see: Viswanathan Peterson 2003: 141–143.

Conclusions

To sum up, Tirumalāmbā described a situation seemingly unknown to her from personal experience[26]—a gory clash between two armies, the Chola's and the Vijayanagara's—using images most familiar to her, among them also those drawn from mythology. In her presentation of the battlefield, images from normal everyday life collide with scenes full of cruelty. Alongside ghastly episodes, there are homely, familiar ones as well. Such a juxtaposition in translating one reality into another could serve, both, to 'tame' the violence of war, if that is possible at all, and to make the war scenes horrific to the highest degree through a technique quite similar to the one employed in creating descriptions of mountains, oceans, etc. The images Tirumalāmbā collects and uses come from her own lived reality, that is the experience of courtly and everyday life: elephant tournaments, assemblies of ladies watching fights of brave warriors and presenting them with garlands, frolicking in the water, walks in the forest, playing with a ball, games of chess, young girls playing house and, at the same time, learning how to prepare food. A childbirth is mentioned as is also playing with children. As discerned from the images recalled above, indeed it was mainly courtly life, as seen through the eyes of the poetess and probably experienced by her personally, and the everyday life that provided the source material and imagery for her poem to contrast them with cruelties of war. When one begins to read the verses and sentences, the first impression is that they present harmless and innocent

[26] Of course, battles and wars were part and parcel of the medieval Indian world. This is evidenced also by the images of combat in Indian art (Figs 1, 2). We also know, even from the stanzas of the *Śiśupālavadha*, that women accompanied their husbands on war expeditions and could also witness the battle scenes:

> ŚV 18.61
> *tyaktaprāṇaṃ saṃyuge hastinīsthā vīkṣya premṇā tatkṣaṇād udgatāsu* |
> *prāpyākhaṇḍād devabhūyaṃ satītvād āśiśleṣa svaiva kañcitpurandhrī* ||
>
> One lady mounted on a female elephant seeing her husband losing his life in the battle, died instantly out of her intense love for him and because of her unbroken chastity, attaining divinity, embraced him herself (transl. Rajendran, C. 2018: 345).

scenes (lotuses, women, cooking, children playing, etc.), and only gradually comes the awareness that they are in fact something terrible.

Arguably, the description of the battlefield found in Tirumalāmbā's *Varadāmbikāpariṇaya-campū* is one of the most unusual, even in the *kāvya* tradition, which has accustomed its audience to the aura of the extraordinary and the accumulation of elements processed by poetic imagination. This juxtaposition of two worlds,[27] one in which (theoretically) love reigns and the other ruled by violence and force, may also speak about the boundary constantly experienced in the place where the battle is fought—the boundary between life and death. Perhaps showcasing this boundary and imbuing it with an emotional content was one of the aims of such an artistic choice made by the author.

What is more, the poetess probably wanted to intensify the feelings experienced by the audience, as was the customary aim of the creators of Sanskrit poetry. The skilfully chosen poetic figures served this very purpose. Perhaps the juxtaposition of the two spheres: one filled with violence, cruelty, arousing fear, apprehension and disgust, and the other—a domain of love, beauty and peace, carried an inculcated element of didacticism, prompting deeper reflection. The description of the battlefield, thus intensified, showed a dramatic picture of violence, the dimension of which distorted and twisted the image of what is beautiful in the ordinary world.

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[27] This is exactly the mechanism at work in the creation of the figure of speech known as *yathāsaṃkhya*. Unsurprisingly, the poetess also uses this figure, which is rather rare in Sanskrit poetry.

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VP-C Tirumalāmbā = Suryakanta (ed.). 1970. *Varadāmbikā Pariṇaya Campū of Tirumalāmbā*, with English Translation, Notes & Introduction (The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Studies LXXIX). Varanasi: The Chowkhamba Vidyabhawan.

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Fig. 1. Battle scene, the outer walls of Mallikārjuna temple at Srisailam.
Photo: Lidia Sudyka

Fig. 2. Battle scenes on the Keśava temple's wall at Somanathapura, built by Somanātha Daṇḍanāyaka, the general of the Hoysala king Narasiṃha III (1254–1291). Photo: Lidia Sudyka

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Rajput Vocabulary of Violence

ABSTRACT: The aim of this article is to reflect on certain keywords of the Rajput world shaped by the "predominantly masculine martial culture" (Kasturi 2002: 12). Those keywords are crucial to understanding the phenomenon of violence in the Rajput milieu, violence that is perpetrated irrespective of *kshatriyahood* and outside the battlefield. Keeping in mind that violence cannot be identified with a particular community, but certain types of aggressive acts can be associated with certain social classes or groups (Kasturi 2002: 20), this article seeks to demonstrate that terms such as *vair*, *bāroṭiyā*, *dacoity*, and *bhomiyāvat*, reveal the mechanisms of collective violence in the socio-political practice of the Rajputs. This will be useful in understanding the cultural background of specific regional patterns of violent behaviour in contrast to the colonial stereotype of a Rajput as primitive, violent, but brave.

KEYWORDS: Rajasthan, Rajputana, Rajputs, Rajput banditry, Thugs

The Rajput warriors of Rajasthan, who established themselves as the political elite of the region, created a world that can be described as predominantly masculine and martial, and a culture which, constructed in this way, manifests itself as rife with violence. This specific culture may be included in the widespread phenomenon of "male" landholding cultures, where institutionalised aggression was formalised in

sports, war and feuds, as described by Malavika Kasturi (2002: 20). Viewed thus, the Rajput culture provides a rich area for the study of violence, which is a broad semantic concept that can be approached via different dimensions and examined from various perspectives. For example, by studying the worship of Jhunjhars (*jũjhār*; literally "a battle-doer")—warriors who are venerated after their violent deaths and often depicted as headless trunks still fighting (see, for example, Harlan 1995: 269–280). Another aspect to consider is the linguistic portrayal of the Rajput world and its depiction in literary descriptions of warfare.

An analysis of the literary style of the Marwari language, commonly known as Dingal, might provide rich material. Dingal was predominantly created by Charan poets who were exclusively associated with the Rajputs. The Charans made outstanding contributions to the creation of the ethos of the *Rajputhood* (*Rājpūtī*) and grounded it well in literature. Marwari, particularly Dingal, developed several unique genres, such as *Ḍiṅgaḷ gīt*, to depict the world of the Rajputs. Notably, the most advanced synonymy in Dingal relates to warfare, specifically the vocabulary of bywords for "warrior-hero," "battle," "army," and "sword." Treatises on poetry and prosody in Dingal, traditionally referred to as "garlands of words" (*nāma mālā*) or dictionaries (*Ḍiṅgaḷa kosa*) contain extensive lists of war terminology. These compendia were used by Rajasthani poets to master eloquence in poetry and praise their Rajput patrons. For instance, the *Ḍiṅgaḷa kosa*, composed by Murārīdān of Būndī in the 19th century, is one of the last treatises of this genre produced in Rajasthan. It contains the largest number of words (7000) and provides a list of fifty synonyms for the word "sword" (see verses 62–65), thirty-nine for "battle" (verses 465–469), seventy for "horse" (verses 80–83, 442), and fifty-five for "elephant" (verses 74–77, 443–444) (Bhāṭī 1978: 174–175, 212, 214). The animals mentioned were also used in warfare. Equally impressive is the stock of synonyms for certain types of weapons.[1] Additionally,

[1] For example, the author uses 9 synonyms for the general term "weapon" (verse 449); 16 for "bow" (verses 451–452); 7 for "bow-string" and 14 for "arrow"

the work includes a vocabulary of thirty-two words for the act of killing, some of which overlap with the nine verbs denoting "to cut; to wound; to make suffer" given in the last two lines:

> (Say:) *māraṇa, gajaṇa, māriyā,* [and] in this place *hacato*.
> *Bhāja, vihaḍaṇa, bhājiyo, ghātaka, jokhama, ghāta,*
> (use) [the terms]: *khaḍaṇa, haṇai, siṃhāra, khapa, ālabhana, vadha*.
> At first [the words] *nāsa, khapāṇū, jhūjha,* then *jhāṛa,*
> *Māra* (and) *hiṃsā, mārato, bhāgaṇa, daḷai, vibhāṛa*.
> *Bāḍhaṇa, carajaṇa, bāḍhiyo, kāṭaṇa, kaṭiyo, kāṭa,*
> *Baḍhiyo, vehara, bāḍhiyo, trāchaṇa, mūchaṇa, trāṭa*.
>
> (verses 240–243 in Bhāṭī 1978: 191)

It is important to note that Indian languages often exhibit extensive synonymy and polysemy, and this is also true of Marwari. The inclusion of vocabulary related to warfare in the compendia for the bards of the Rajputs indicates the widespread presence of violence in their culture.

However, this article aims to clarify specific keywords in the Rajput vocabulary that are essential to comprehend the occurrence of collective violence carried out by Rajputs, irrespective of the concept of *kshatriyahood* and outside the battlefield. It should also be borne in mind that violence cannot be identified with any particular community, but some specific types of aggressive acts can be associated with certain social classes or groups (Kasturi 2002: 20), and as we shall see, some of these terms also have colonial overtones. Examples of this type of violence are not found in ancient history, but rather in the early modern period. This is due to two reasons: firstly, the 19th century is much better documented, providing more extant material; secondly, the story of violence in the 19th century presents slightly different overtones than those previously attested to in Rajput culture and literature.

(verses 453–454); 19 for the small dagger known as *kaṭārī* (verses 458–460); 20 for "spear" and "lance"—*bhālā* (verses 461–462); 5 for "small spear" or "javelin"—*barachī* (verse 463); 4 for "gun" or "small cannon" (verse 465); and 16 synonyms for "armour" (verses 446–447) (Bhāṭī 1978: 212–214).

This is largely because the rules of the game have changed quite drastically due to the colonial presence (cf. Vidal 1997: 13). In response to European colonisers, violence in India had also escalated. The understanding of violence in India, specifically in the interesting us period, has, moreover, been influenced by colonial discourse.

Blood feud

One noteworthy keyword in the vocabulary of collective violence from the precolonial world of the Rajputs is *vair/bair*, a Sanskrit word that generally means "enmity" or "hostility" in most North Indian languages. However, in the Rajput vocabulary, it has a more specific and narrow meaning: the debt of vengeance owed upon the murder of a member of a Rajput brotherhood, known as *bhāībandh*[2] (Saran and Ziegler 2001.1: 84, 264). Accordingly, *vair* refers to collective violence in the form of the Rajput vendetta or a blood feud. Muhaṇot Naiṇsī (1610–1670), considered one of the most trustworthy native annalists of Rajasthan, provides numerous examples of the practice of *vair* in his historical accounts (in *Naiṇsī rī khyāt* and *Mārvāṛ rā parganāṃ rī vigat*) (Sakariyā 1960–1967; Bhāṭī 1968–1974; see also Saran 1978). For instance: between the Rāṭhoṛs of Jodhpur and the Devṛos of Sīrohī; between the Jeso Bhāṭīs and the Mālhaṇ Cauhāns, and between the Śekhāvats and the Gauṛs. There were conflicts between the Cāvros of Īḍar and the Rāṭhoṛs of Jodhpur, as well as between the Rāṭhoṛs and the Solankīs, and between the Paṃvārs of Cāṭsū and the Rāṭhoṛs, etc. (Saran and Ziegler 2001.1: 61–62, 74, 145 and 2001.2: 31, 41, 47, 53). These conflicts included both sporadic fights as well as collective raids on the territory of a Rajput clan, which were carried out to avenge someone's death. Additionally, personal combats were also common.

[2] "Literally, "bound as brothers"; a brotherhood; those related through ties of male blood to a common male ancestor. Among Rajputs, membership in a *bhāībandh* included all males sharing common descent, unmarried daughters, and wives, who became members through the act of marriage" (the definition of *bhāībandh* given by Saran and Ziegler 2001.1: 248).

The following example is taken from *Naiṇsī rī khyāt,* which recounts the story of the founder of Jodhpur, Rāv Jodhā (Raj. Jodho Riṇmalot; r. 1439–1489). In this account, Rāv Jodhā sends his son, Dūdā (Dūdo Jodhāvat), to settle a long-standing *vair* by killing the Rajput Meghā (Megho Narsiṅghot):

> Rāv Jodho had lain down. The storytellers were conversing. They were telling stories about those who rule. One said: "The Bhāṭīs do not have a single *vair* remaining [unsettled]." [Another] one spoke up: "The Rāṭhoṛs have a *vair."* [A third] one stated: "One Rāṭhoṛ *vair* remains [unsettled]." [Someone] said: "Which one?" They said: "The *vair* of Āskaraṇ Satāvat remains [unsettled]. The *vair* of the time that Narbadjī captured Supiyārde." Then Rāv Jodhojī heard the conversation. He asked them: "What are you saying?" They said: *"Jī*, nothing at all." Then he spoke up: "No, no! Tell [me]!" Then they said: *"Jī*, Āskaraṇ himself had no son, and Narbadjī also had no son. Thus this *vair* remains [unsettled]." Hearing this statement, Rāv Jodhojī kept [it] in mind.
>
> In the morning, when [Rāv Jodhojī] was seated in the *darbār,* Kuṃvar Dūdo came and paid [his] respects. The Rāvjī was displeased with Dūdo. The Rāvjī said: "Dūdo! Megho Sīndhaḷ should be killed." Dūdo performed *salām*.[3] The Rāvjī spoke: "Dūdo! Narbadjī captured Supiyārde; in exchange, Narsiṅghdās Sīndhaḷ killed Āskaraṇ Satāvat. Narsiṅghdās has a son, Megho; go and kill him." (*Naiṇsī rī khyāt* 3:38 in Saran and Ziegler 2001.1: 188)

Retaliatory violence was culturally sanctioned in the socio-political practice of the Rajputs, and the *vair* was commonly accepted. For example, Dūdā received a horse and a rich gift of *sirpāv*[4] from his father for eliminating Meghā (Saran and Ziegler 2001.2: 337).

An effective method of resolving the *vair* was an exchange of women in marriage alliances (Kolff 1990: 100–101). Such a solution is found, for instance, in the early 19th-century poetic treatise

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[3] The performance of *salām* is an act of obedience.

[4] *Sirpāv* or *siropāv*—literally "from head to toe"; a very prestigious and generous gift of material goods and cloths from an emperor or a king.

Raghunāth rūpak by the poet Mañch or Maṃsārām Sevag (1773–1835), which theorises the Dingal poetic figure known as *vayaṇ sagāī* using the concept of the *vair*:

> If there is a situation of fierce family feud arising from a murder [of kinsman],
> By giving a word of engagement [between such families], no feud remains any further.[5]
>
> (transl. Dalpat Rajpurohit 2022: 384)

Rebels for the sake of land

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to provide a brief introduction to some other elementary concepts of the Rajput world. In Rajasthan, Rajputs had established themselves as a landed class with exclusive rights to land, and therefore much of the Rajput culture revolves around land and soil. The most common term for a Rajput at the local level is *bhomiyā* (Raj. *bhomiyo*), which means a landholder (literally: "one of the soil"). The strong attachment to the land in Rajasthan has given rise to various ideas, such as the worship of heroes like *Bhomiyājī*, who died protecting the land, (Lāḷas 1962.III.2: 3453)[6], and the belief that the blood shed by Rajputs in battle drains into the soil and the souls of dead warriors return as rain, fertilising the land of Rajasthan. The Rajputs commonly describe their motherland with the motto taken from *Bhagavadgītā*: *vīr bhogya vasundharā*, which means that only brave heroes (*vīr*) have the right to enjoy (*bhogya*) the resources of the earth (*vasundharā*). This refers to sustaining oneself through the land and, more precisely, consuming the land (Raj. *dhartī bhogṇo*).

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[5] *Khūṃna kiyā jāṇau khalaka, hāḍa baira jo hoya,*
Baṇai sagāī vayaṇa to, kalpata rahai na koya. (v.1/20; Cāraṇ 2019: 43).

[6] It should be added that *Bhomiyājī* may also be revered if he died protecting Hindu religion, Brahmins, or cattle.

The term *bāroṭiyā* (Raj. *bāroṭiyo*) connotes the Rajput identity as a landed class and as perpetrators of violence. It is derived from the Sanskrit words *bahis* and *vāṭaḥ*, meaning *ad litteram* "a banished/cast out person." It refers to a specific type of a rebel who, due to dissent, revolts against the authority or power of a king, or a state.[7] However, the dictionary entry does not provide sufficient context for a proper understanding of this term. It is important to note that not every rebel is considered *bāroṭiyā*. This term specifically applies to those who have been driven away by the confiscation of their property, leaving them landless and without a means of livelihood, which incites them to rebel.

Regarding traditional modes of protest in the Rajput milieu that require the use of force, or violence, one may also include the concept of *bāroṭiyā*s. Historical studies support this claim. For instance, Denis Vidal's research in the context of the small Rajput state of Sirohi highlights the significant role played by noble revolts (i.e. Rajputs), tribal rebellions, threats of migration, and collective suicide of Brahmins or bards in regulating society. Furthermore, incitements to rebellion were a significant factor among social and political forces in Rajasthan, both historically and in the 19th century. Disobedience and rebelliousness by nobles and landholders (*jāgīrdār*s) affected the administrative, political, economic, and social structures of the traditional state (Vidal 1997: 5, 33; Hooja 2009: 771).

After this brief introduction to the traditional world of the Rajputs, it is interesting to examine what occurred in the 19th century. As territorial expansion of Rajput lineages was no longer feasible due to the scarcity of land for further conquest and the emergence of new political supremacy of European colonisers, violence was also directed inwards. This resulted in raids and feuds among Rajput clans themselves, which escalated to a remarkable extent. The British, who mainly focused on revenue systems and succession rights, viewed Rajputs' behaviour as mere acts of aggression. They did not fully comprehend the cultural mechanisms and the empowerment at work

[7] The term has many variants, such as: *bāroṭiyau*, *bāroṭau*, *bāroṭhiyau*, *bāroṭhīyau*, *bārbāṭiyo*, *bāharṭiyo*, *bāharbāṭ*, *bāharvāṭ* (Lāḷas 1962.III.2: 3025).

behind it. At the beginning of the 19th century, the British still had insufficient knowledge of Rajasthan and lacked precise maps (Vidal 1997: 30). Like in other regions of India, they also remained generally ignorant of the society they were ruling (Bayly 1999: 167). In 1817, Colonel James Tod (1782–1835) was among the first officers of the East India Company to be sent to Rajasthan (known as Rajputana during colonial times) for reconnaissance and intelligence gathering. His monograph on the history of Rajputana was one of the earliest regional histories ever written by a European in India. It undoubtedly shaped the way of viewing Rajasthan and its inhabitants, and contributed considerably to creating colonial knowledge of the area (see Tod 1997.1 [1829] and 1997.2 [1832]).[8] The post of a separate Political Agent to the Governor-General for Rajputana was created only in 1832, with Lt. Col. Lockett being the first appointee (Gupta and Bakshi 2008: 296). At that time, the British did not recognise acts of rebellion as a distinct form of opposition born in response to the drastic reshaping of reality by the colonisers.

It is important to consider the complexity of the factors at play during the 19th century. It is also significant to note that the colonial world was not simply divided into binaries, for example, into colonisers and the colonised, as some native groups also played a role in shaping the new reality alongside the colonisers (Loomba 2000: 105). This is particularly true for Rajasthan, as the region was never officially under direct European control and was therefore not included in British India, the Raj. The Treaty of 1818 obligated the rulers of the Princely States of Rajputana to cooperate with the British East India Company. However, many of their subjects, including the ordinary *bhomiyā*s, opposed their chieftains and waged bloody campaigns when their privileges or rights were questioned. Though after 1818, the native kingdoms were nominally autonomous entities under British protection, in practice, the British demanded loyalty, and intervened in the internal affairs

[8] Tod's writings can serve as an exemplary work that can be used to demonstrate the deconstruction of colonial discourse. Bayly ironically described Tod's book as "an extraordinary neo-gothic monument" (in Vidal 1997: 24).

and politics of the region (for more information, see Singh 1973 and Kapil 1999). These factors contributed to outbursts of violence and the evolution of the term *bāroṭiyā*, which gained new currency.

From a rebel to a dacoit

The British attitude towards the natives was ambivalent and contradictory. This is reflected in the creation of categories such as "martial races," "criminal tribes" (for more information, see Piliavsky 2015; Gayer 1910),[9] and even "feminine races" like the Bengalis who were regarded as feeble and spineless, but clever (Metcalf and Metcalf 2006: 112). In addition to "othering," there was also romanticisation of certain communities. The British expected the Rajputs, as landed aristocracy, to collaborate with the colonial state. However, this led to the idealisation of the Rajputs as "a romantic band of adventurers, reminiscent in some ways of the Highland clans of Scotland because of their clanship and their intense love and admiration for the blood feud" (in Kasturi 2002: 19). Presentations such as these, which echo intellectual framing of James Tod, have contributed to the stereotype that the Rajputs are representatives of the martial race: brave but primitive and violent. Similarly, local Rajput banditry has been attributed to pride, laziness, and poverty (*ibid.*: 200).

Contradictions in the approach towards the indigenous people of India can also be observed in the fact that certain groups of society were romanticised or admired while simultaneously being criminalised. As Vidal notes, the British attempted to marginalise or demilitarise groups with military traditions, such as the Rajputs and certain tribes, who could pose a threat to European business interests. Meanwhile, the trading castes of Rajasthan (later known as the Marwaris) were among the first groups to be included in the new commercial and financial networks established in British India. Therefore, groups

[9] Grayer's work is available at https://archive.org/details/dli.ministry.03665/page/n5/mode/2up (accessed on 20.02.2023).

that had previously and traditionally relied on force to control inter-regional trade were left with no choice but to defend their established privileges related to land revenue (Vidal 1997: 11).

In this context, the phenomenon of rebels fighting for land intensified in the 19th century. Let us come back to the proper understanding of the term *bāroṭiyā*, a rebel whose property has been sequestrated so that he becomes a bandit, a plunderer (*ḍākū*, *luṭerā*),[10] who summons his people and "carries on his depredations with impunity" (cf. the entry *bahirwutteea* in Crooke 1993 [1903]: 50). The coining of a separate term for this category of outlaws implies that it was a prevalent practice for a warrior to transform himself into a marauding rebel during early modern Rajasthan. This is further implicitly supported by the existence of a rich variety of synonyms for the term "bandit" in the vocabulary of the aforementioned 19th-century treatise *Ḍiṅgaḷa kosa*:

> The word 'bandit'
> Learn [the words] *dhāṛī, ḍākū, dhāṛvī, dhāṭi, parāt,*
> Repeat established [terms] *jhokāyat* [and] *dhāṛāyat*
> (verses 470 in Bhāṭī 1978: 214)

Kasturi studied the phenomenon of the so-called Rajput banditry outside of Rajasthan, specifically in Bundelkhand. Although she does not use the term *bāroṭiyā*, she confirms the existence of an identical a phenomenon. She writes:

> Indeed, an analysis of most stories relating to Rajput bandits suggests that blood feuds, enmities, rebellion against the state for confiscation of rights, loss of land and economic hardship appear to have been the commonest causes for banditry. (Kasturi 2002: 200)

[10] The term's meanings as an adjective provide additional context: "scattered," "disorganised," "perturbed," "broken," "ruined," and "destroyed" (Raj. *bāharābāṭ, bāharāvaṭ, bāharūvaṭ, bāharābaṭ*; H. *titar-bitar, ast-vyast, vichinn, naṣṭ bhraṣṭ, barbād, anāth, āśrayhīn*) (Lāḷas 1962.III.2: 3022).

In the early 19th century, the term *bahirwutteea, baroutiah*, or *burouteea* (spelt variously in English sources) was frequently used in letters of political British agents for Rajputana and in other writings (see, for example, Alves to Macnaghten, dt. 27.06.1835; *Delhi Gazette*, 07.07.1847). Over time, this local term got colonial superstructure and was replaced by the more colonially meaningful *dacoit*, along with the term *dacoity* (Raj., H. *ḍakaitī*), which denotes collective banditry. The British defined the same as an act committed by a gang of at least five men (see the entry *dacoit, dacoo* in Crooke 1993 [1903]: 290). Although the term *dacoit* was derived from the Indian word *ḍākū*, which was also used in Bengal, it was later incorporated into the Penal Code (*ibid.*). However, its meaning in the nineteenth century may have also encompassed the concept of a western Indian brigand—*bāroṭiyā*. The criminalisation and demonisation of Indian subjects in colonial propaganda was influenced by the phenomenon of collective raids by the Rajputs.

Therefore, the term *dacoit* carries a significant colonial connotation and cannot be understood as interchangeable with the vernacular term *ḍākū*. It is also evident that indigenous and colonial discourses have influenced each other, but have used the same narrative to justify different concerns (Kasturi 2002: 18). It is interesting to note that the *dacoit* label was not applied equally to all, and in fact such a practice has not changed in modern historiography to this today. To illustrate this point, let us consider the case of George Thomas (approx. 1756–1802). During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, he earned a living through plunder, raids, and violence. He was even able to capture some land and establish his own small state in present-day *Hariyana*. He declared himself ruler of the region from 1798–1801 and even minted his own coins (Dalrymple 2004: 32). In the years 1798–1799 George Thomas raided the territory of Rajasthan—for example, the region of Shekhawati—with the purpose of looting (Śarmā 2015: 58; Cooper 2014: 81, 161; Hooja 2009: 682–683). Despite his actions, he is never presented as a dacoit, but rather as an Irish adventurer, an adventurous soldier-of-fortune, mercenary, sailor. This highlights the biased language used to describe European plunderers, who

are often given more palatable classification label than their Indian counterparts, who are referred to as dacoits. It is important to note that Rajputs who collaborated with the colonial authorities or did not pose a threat to the Company, despite continuing their careers as freebooters, were still considered native allies. An example of such a person is Amir Khan (1765–1834), a Pindari freebooter who managed to carve out a separate state of Tonk in Rajputana. He was rewarded by the Company for his support in the British victory over Bharatpur in 1805 (Bhāṭī 1956: 140) and was later, in 1817, recognised as a Nawab (ruler) by the British (Hooja 2009: 779). However, those who carried out similar depredations and land-grabbing, but were not specific British allies, were labelled as dacoits. Thus, forging such delicate distinctions followed inconsistent template in the colonial creations of the Other. Similar mechanisms can be observed in the creation of criminal castes or tribes, where all groups or communities whose activities were deemed suspicious or incomprehensible to the colonial power were grouped together. This article only provides a general overview due to limitations of space, however, it is relevant to note that all groups that were not inclined to collaborate were classified as dangerous (for more information, see Sinha 2008).

Bhūmiyāvat

The term *bhūmiyāvat* also suggests a collective violence and savagery associated with land-grabbing, as defined by the colonial era. It refers to "a general plundering, or more correctly a fight between neighbouring Zamindars about landed property" (Elliot 1869: 236).[11] This term appears to describe behaviour similar to that of *bāroṭiyā*s in Rajasthan, but it is a Hindi word with evidently colonial undertones. This word is likely of recent origin, possibly from the 19th century, and was most probably newly coined because it is not attested to in any dictionaries, whether Rajasthani or Hindi. The Rajasthani language

[11] It is available at https://archive.org/details/dli.csl.7554 (accessed: 19.09.2022).

dictionary only lists the masculine noun *bhomiyāvaṇṭ*, alternatively *bhūmiyāvaṇṭ*, as a term for "a custom of land distribution as equal shares among members of a Rajput lineage" (Lāḷas 1962.III.2: 3453). The *Hindī śabdsāgar*, first published between 1916–1928, does not include this word at all. Even in the *Hobson-Jobson* colonial glossary, the term *bhūmiyāvat* cannot be found. The trail appears to lead to William Henry Sleeman (1788–1856), an ambitious officer of the East India Company, "an eminent self-publicist" (Wagner 2007: 7), who is primarily remembered as the Commissioner for the Suppression of Thuggee and Dacoity. From the perspective of postcolonial studies, the existence of the Thugs, described by Sleeman as a fraternity of ritual stranglers and religious fanatics who prayed on travellers who were then used in human sacrifices to the goddess Kālī (*ibid*.: 1–2), has been deconstructed and questioned. This is because all information about the Thugs comes solely from testimonies of arrested and interrogated men accused of being Thugs (see, e. g., Woerkens 2002; Wagner 2007). Sleeman's collection and analysis of the language used by the Thugs revealed it to be a slang used by the working-class in northern India (Bayly 1999: 173; see Sleeman 1836). The term *bhūmiyāvat* was thus popularised by Sleeman with the aforementioned meaning, as he wrote:

> Though, no doubt, it is very similar to our ancestors during the middle ages, this is a thing happily but little understood in Europe at the present day. Bhoomeeawut, in Bundelcund, signifies a war or fight for landed inheritance, from Bhoom, the land, earth, & c.; Bhoomeea, a landed proprietor.
>
> When a member of the landed aristocracy, no matter however small, has a dispute with his ruler, he collects his followers, and levies indiscriminate war upon his territories, plundering and burning his towns and villages, and murdering their inhabitants, till he is invited back upon his own terms. During this war, it is a point of honour not to allow a single acre of land to be tilled upon the estate which he has deserted, or from which he has been driven, and he will murder any men who attempts to drive a plough in it, together with all his family, if he can. (…) Such a marauder has generally the sympathy of nearly all the members of his

> own class and clan, who are apt to think that his case may one day be their own. He is thus looked upon as contending for the interests of all. (Sleeman 1844: 318–319)[12]

Thus, the term *bhūmiyāvat* can only be properly understood in the colonial context in which the Rajputs restored to collective violence after being deprived of their land, power, and privileges due to the entry of new colonial institutions.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the existence of a lexicon of terms that describe collective acts of aggression resulting in harm to others is a strong evidence of institutionalised violence in the Rajput community. It is not surprising, therefore, that the lexicons of Rajasthani have been expanded to include entries such as those listed and analysed in this article. Particularly remarkable are the obvious links between aesthetics and violence: the theoretical exploration of high poetry through the examples of Rajput social phenomena related to the perpetration of violence. This is a method used in Dingal's poetic treatises where one finds the juxtaposition of the literary with the social, which has been illustrated here using as examples terms *vair* and *ḍākū*. The amalgamation is further developed by mixing it with the religious, as these elements are woven into the structure of the narrative that frames the story of Rāma (see also Rajpurohit 2022: 383).

In this article, an attempt has been made to specify certain keywords by analysing various types of agents of violence in Rajput society. Terms such as *bāroṭiyā*, *ḍākū*, *dacoit*, and *thug*, which may appear to have similar meanings when translated, have been differentiated. This contextual clarification leads to a better understanding of Rajput

[12] It is available at https://archive.org/details/ramblesrecollect01sleeuoft (accessed on 19.10.2022). The term *bhūmiyāvat* has been used with the same colonial meaning by Kolff (1990: 125) and the Hindi dictionary (McGregor 2016: 772).

male violence. The main point of this paper is that not all rebels are *bāroṭiyā*s and not all *bāroṭiyā*s are dacoits.

The violence in focus is thus closely linked to the land and deserves further study. Current paper drew special attention to the colonial milieu that resulted in British colonial rule re-evaluating Rajput violence, as well as genesis of terms such as *dacoit* and *bhūmiyāvat*. Both these terms were colonial and ethnographic inventions that have since become part of the common vocabulary, as has the creation of categories such as "martial races" and "criminal or predatory tribes."

Therefore, it is important to exercise caution as the vocabulary associated with violence in India is often clouded by the Orientalist slant and Western constructions of the Other. One must remember that colonialism not only inflicted its own violence but also altered and redefined the pre-existing nature and meaning of violence in Rajput culture (cf. Vidal 1997). Recognising this is particularly important today as one of the colonial, romanticised ascriptions of a particular kind of bravery to the Rajputs—brave flowers of chivalry—has not come to an end but has been re-used in modern Hindu nationalist discourse.

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Studies on Tantra in Bengal and Eastern India. Ed. Madhu Khanna, Singapore: Springer 2022. pp. 188. ISBN 978-981-19-3022-5 (eBook)

—Reviewed by Robert Czyżykowski (Jagiellonian University, Cracow, Poland)

The volume, which is the outcome of a workshop organized in Kolkata by the Tantra Foundation (New Delhi), explores one of the most important but still not adequately researched subjects, namely Tantric traditions of Eastern India. According to the introductory statement, the prime focus of the volume is the concept of Śakti in its different aspects, be they theological or material like pilgrimage sites. Notwithstanding the often disparate and highly varied forms of Tantra found in Eastern India (such as multifarious strands of the Vajrayāna or Sahajiyā tradition), the cult of Śakti is undoubtedly one of the most important and strongest not only in this region but possibly in the whole of the Indian subcontinent. In spite of this, the Eastern India Tantra is still largely underexplored; hence, current volume fills up the glaring lacuna in the scholarship on Tantra, Śaktism, Vaiṣṇavism and other traditions permeated by Tantra, all interconnected through a complex network of mutual influences and appropriations. Eastern India is defined in the Introduction as comprising of an area equivalent to what is historically spoken of as Greater Bengal which includes the present-day Bengal, Assam, Bihar and Orissa in India, as well as Bangladesh and Nepal outside it.

The volume is divided into three parts. Part I, *Cult Inclusiveness, Tantric Śakta and Vaiṣṇava Synthesis*, touches on the processes of syncretism between Śākta and Vaiṣṇava traditions. Part II, *The Śākta Pīṭha*s: *Great and Small, Ancient and Modern*, provides an overview of the key component of Śākta Tantra, namely places where the divine dwells or the renowned pilgrimage site of Kāmākhyā. Finally, Part III, *Śākta Theology*, presents papers on the topic of Śākta doctrines which emerged in the medieval period. The first part is made up of three articles, while the second and the third comprise of two articles each. All articles are devoted to specific problems which are seldom discussed in academic discourse on Tantra.

The book opens with Introduction by the editor, Madhu Khanna, who gives an overview of the historical development and specificity of the regional religious traditions and particularly Tantric traditions. It brings attention to various forms of worship of female divinities and the prominence of Śākta tradition. It also highlights the issue of the fluidity of borders between various premodern traditions, an issue which is also emphasized in the papers that follow. It should be also mentioned that all papers are case studies focused on specific instances of Tantric tradition of the region, not a general history or an overview of the problems connected to Tantra.

First paper, by Madhu Khanna, "The Making of Tantric Rādhā: A Reading from the *Kṛṣṇayāmala*" analyzes the process of tantricization of the Vaiṣṇava goddess Rādhā and various features associated with this matter. The author introduces the reader to a less known text, *Kṛṣṇayāmala*, and supports the narration with numerous references to other sources like *Rādhā-tantra*. Goddess Rādhā, despite the significant presence in the Vaiṣṇava traditions (especially the Gauḍīya or the Bengali Vaiṣṇava), did not attract enough scholarly attention. In the Caitanya tradition, Rādhā is recognized as Kṛṣṇa's *hlādinī śakti* (or Joy-rendering power), and in terms of Vaiṣṇava theology the topic was described also in a wider, Tantric context. The most striking element of *Kṛṣṇayāmala*'s narrative is the identification of Rādhā with the goddess Tripurasundarī. This Vaiṣṇava Śākta synthesis is an important feature of the regional Tantra.

Glen. A. Hayes, a specialist in Sahajiyā tradition, gives us valuable insights into the mysterious world of Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās in his paper, "Prema and Śakti: Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā Appropriations of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism and Śaktism in the *Ānandabhairava* of Prema Dāsa". The author focuses here on one of the early works, namely *Ānandabhairava* of the Sahajiyā corpus, which contains many elements of Śākta, such as the concept of Ādyā Śakti and the 'garland of bones'. It provides possible proof of the significant Śākta influence on the early Sahajiyā lineages, influence which might be also deducted from other Sahajiyā sources like *Amṛtaratnāvalī, Amṛtarasāvalī* or *Niguḍārthaprakāśāvalī* where we find various enumeration of internal bodily *śakti*s styled as Vaiṣṇava *sahkhī*s or *mañjarī*s, and the general process of adjustment of the Śākta material to the Sahajiyā tradition. The Sahajiyā sources are extremely murky and esoteric therefore every new step to understand this important tradition is welcomed. However, the exact source of the Śākta material and history of the transmission between Śaktism and Sahajiyā tradition still wait to be researched.

Last paper of Part I is also focused on the vernacular sources and the so-called 'Bāul-Sahajiyā' tradition. Kaustubh Das, in his article titled "Tantra in the Vernacular: Secrecy and Inclusivity in the Yogas of the Bāul-Sahajiyā Traditions", tries to enlarge our understanding of this esoteric Tantric Bengali tradition. By considering the Bāuls and the premodern Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyās as representing doctrinally coherent Tantric communities, Das proposes the interpretation of the Bāul-Sahajiyās as framed in a wider Eastern Tantric stream and seriously influenced by the Kashmiri traditions while simultaneously inheriting the Vajrayāna traditions of Eastern India. Detecting Trika and framing Sahajiyā tradition in a wider philosophical context seems to be the main contribution of the paper and is ambitious in terms of reconstruing such doctrinal basis. However, my serious doubts relate to the use of the composite term—Bāul-Sahajiyā tradition—and the essentialization of these two groups as belonging to one tradition. We know that for centuries various lineages were transmitting esoteric knowledge; also, the use of the esoteric vocabulary was neither coherent nor consistent. Considering

the contemporary Bāul tradition as equivalent to the premodern or late medieval Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā traditions is only partially justified. Moreover, the historical evidence for the continuation of the Vajrayāna tradition in Eastern India and the Mahāsiddhas heritage (which does not appear to be critically examined in the academic literature) is weak and needs further research.

Part II opens with paper by Brenda Dobia, "Power and Desire in the Worship of the Goddess Kāmākhyā", which gives us valuable information on the importance of Kāmapīṭha (which is actually Yonipīṭha or the womb of the goddess). Mythologically rooted in Assam, this specific *pīṭha* joins two primeval notions of Tantra or power (*śakti*) and desire (*kāma*). The author leads the reader through the various aspects of the Śākta cult connected with Kāmākhyā including rituals, transgressive issues, and the role of the female principle. The article is based not only on textual sources, but also on field research conducted by the author in the Kāmākhyā temple. The concept of female principle glorified and worshipped in Tantric rituals connected with Kāmākhyā is carefully examined on the basis of various sources which ultimately give an ambivalent picture of the whole issue. According to the author, the rituals and religious life revolving around the Kāmākhyā temple could be understood primarily as the concept of *sṛṣṭi* or creation where goddess power (*śakti*) brings living beings to life and maintains them, and where the ritual cycle reflects the biological schemes and rhythms (such as menstruation).

Kamal K. Mishra in his paper, "The Metamorphosis of the 'Gāchh Tar Vālī' and the Making of an Śakti-Pīṭha in Mithila", presents the fascinating and complex world of the Śākta related traditions in Mithila, an ancient region situated in North India and comprising parts of today's Bihar and Jharkhand. The picture which emerges from Mishra's paper is of an astonishing syncretism related to various manifestations of Śakti through centuries, connected either with Hinduism and Buddhism, or with Tantra and regional, vernacular cults. Mithila represents somehow a separate example of Śakti-pīṭha with a strong Vajrayāna history and connection to Tibet (Māhācina?). The crucial event is related to the establishment of Śakti-pīṭha in Mithila and the

cult of goddesses Tārā and Mahāvidyās, with the same, interestingly, strongly influenced by the Buddhist elements.

The last two chapters constitute Part III of the book. "Gynocentric Cosmogony in the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*" by Arghya Dipta Kar is focused on the selected themes from one of the important *upapurāṇa*s (secondary *purāṇa*s) which originated in Bengal, namely the *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa*. The current study is based on the analysis of the mythological tripartite narrative structure focused on the process of creation. Author investigates the multilayered textual work by paying special attention this topic; this is followed by taking a close look at the three goddesses connected to the creation myth. The set of the three goddesses seems to reflect other divine triads, important for Hindu traditions. The important feature of the paper is the presentation of the gynocentric cosmogony in terms of the evolution trajectory from the Viṣṇu myth to the Śākta themes. The text of *Devībhāgavata* provides evidence of the process of development of Śākta theology in the premodern Bengal.

The last study, by Sthaneswar Timalsina, "Revisiting Śākta Advaita: The Monistic Śākta Philosophy in the *Guhyopaniṣad*", is a reprint from the journal *ZeitschriftfürIndologie und Südasienstudien* (34: 247–258. 2017). It brings to light the issues of the appearance of non-dualistic and monistic philosophy in Śākta sources in terms of the autoreflection of the tradition and in reference to the classical Upaniṣadic corpus. The reworking and the synthesis of these concepts are crystallized in the cult of Guhyakālī (esoteric, cryptic form of the worship of goddess Kālī), found in the Kathmandu Valley. Crucial in this context are Trika Tantric concepts blended with Upaniṣadic ideas. The author considers various sources in this process of fusion, namely the autochthonous rituals, Tantric sources, and Upaniṣadic ideas. The main source is the *Guhyopaniṣad*, text derived from larger *Mahākālasaṃhitā*. The nondualist and monistic aspects of Tantric tradition (with the exception of Kashmir-Śaiva tradition) are still not widely present in academic literature, hence paper fills the lacuna, highlighting the specific Śākta Advaita philosophy.

To conclude, the volume is a valuable contribution to Tantric studies, with articles potentially of interest not only to those specializing

in Tantra or South Asian Studies, but also scholars of religious studies, art historians and anthropologists. However, it must be emphasized that the content of the volume is highly specialistic and selective, focusing on the Śākta features of Tantra in Greater Bengal, and not Tantra in the region of South Asia in general. One critical remark is also necessary: the volume is marred by some typos; this problem, I believe, can be easily corrected in the e-book version.

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Razak Khan. 2022. *Minority Pasts: Locality, Emotions, and Belonging in Princely Rampur*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. Mir Yar Ali 'Jan Sahib'. 2021. *The Incomparable Festival*. Ed. Razak Khan. Transl. Shad Naved. Gurugram: Penguin Random House India. —Reviewed by Maria Puri (independent scholar)

For a reader, susceptible to the allure of a well-turned book which is furnished with a beautiful cover and a title holding a promise of a voyage into lesser-known domains, the two books in focus, Razak Khan's *Minority Pasts: Locality, Emotions, and Belonging in Princely Rampur*, and its companion volume, *The Incomparable Festival*, are indeed a rare treat. While the first offers an overview of the "histories and politics of Muslims in Rampur—the last Muslim ruled state in the colonial United Provinces" (Razak 2022: 2), the latter introduces the anglophone reader to a 19th-century Urdu poem, *Musaddas tahniyat-e-jashn-e-benazir* [Felicitations for the Incomparable Festival], by Mir Yar Ali 'Jan Sahib' of Rampur, exquisitely translated by Shad Naved and introduced by Razak Khan.

An insidious thread links both books at the visual level. The book cover of the Penguin Classics edition of *The Incomparable Festival* showcases a portrait of the poet, his name written underneath in Urdu: Mir Yar Ali alias (*urf*) Jan Sahib Rekhtigo, the likeness sourced from a miniature painting, courtesy Rampur Raza Library (Khan 2021: 82).

The cover of *Minority Pasts: Locality, Emotions, and Belonging in Princely Rampur*, picks up on the earlier book's pictorial clues and by way of another, closely related painting, "a visual depiction of the *Jashn-e-Benazir* celebration in princely Rampur" (Khan 2022: back cover), surreptitiously epitomizes objectives underwriting Razak Khan's research project and his views on the history of the local. The "royal festival *jashn-e-benazir*, first held in 1866 by the Nawab Kalb-e-Ali Khan (1832–87) with the aim of promoting art, culture and trade in the state" (*ibid.*: 4) thus becomes an allegory for the larger story of a quest "to understand localized Muslim political and historical experiences" (*ibid.*: 1–2) against the regional as well as the larger, pan-regional backdrop.

With present-day technologies providing handy tools which allow us to peep into books in a virtual space, on the publishers' or the sellers' websites, it seems almost superfluous to reiterate the books' contents in a review. However, not yet ready to abandon a useful template, I present here briefly a formal structural arrangement of both books. In the case of *The Incomparable Festival*, its two main parts, evenly matched in length, are Introduction (pp. 1–40) and Translation (pp. 41–80). These are followed by Editor's Note and Acknowledgments (pp. 81–82), Translator's Note and Acknowledgements (pp. 83–86), Bibliography and Notes.

Introduction, as we learn later (Khan 2022: xiii), is also reiterated in parts as Chapter 1 of *Minority Pasts* where historical milieu is given more attention and where Jan Sahib's princely patron, Nawab Kalb-e-Ali Khan (r. 1865–1887), to whom the *musaddas*[1] is dedicated, and whose life spans the pre-Mutiny and the post-Mutiny periods, is discussed at greater length. In *The Incomparable Festival*, however, we are given a fine, in-depth textual analysis of the poem itself, spoken of as a "literary artefact", "a quintessential text that evokes the locale of princely Rampur [and] its literary centrality (*markaz*)" (Khan 2021: 4). One needs to remember that at that point in time, with the

[1] A poem in six-line stanzas used for commemorative or hortatory verse, a late-classical form which reached its fruition during the late 19th century.

end of the Mughal (Delhi) and the Awadh (Lucknow) states, Rampur, which had remained loyal to the British during the Mutiny (1857), had indeed emerged as an important cosmopolitan centre, a political, social and cultural *markaz* of the region, an "Oasis in the desert", a "Refuge", an "Arampur", a seat of power which aspired to be seen as the next, after Deccan, Delhi and Lucknow, school of poetry, *Dabistan-e-Rampur* (Khan 2022: 30–36).

Mir Yar Ali 'Jan Sahib' (1818–1886), already a recognized poet linked to the Awadhi literary public sphere, writes Khan (2021: 4), fled "the post-1857 destruction of Lucknow and moved to the Rampur state, attracted by its royal patronage". The caption below his portrait on the book cover gives us not only his name, Mir Yar Ali, but also his *nom de plume*, Jan Sahib, while simultaneously specifying his area of expertise: a *rekhti-go,* exponent and performer of *rekhti*; histories of Urdu literature further tell us that Jan Sahib was probably "the last exemplary *rekhti-go*" (*ibid.*: 37).

A working, standard definition of what *rekhti* is, can be found in Platts's dictionary: "*rek̲h̲tī* (fr. *rek̲h̲ta*), s.f. Hindūstānī verse written in the language of women, and expressing the sentiments, &c. peculiar to them," (Platts 1884: 611, quoted after Khan 2021: 2), with Ruth Vanita's seminal study (2012) providing a more precise exposition, alongside a large format theorisation, specifically for the pre-mutiny Awadh culture. Among poets, the practitioners of *rekhti*, she discusses, we find Mir Yar Ali, whose *Musaddas tahniyat-e-jashn-e-benazir* falls just within the cut-off boundary of the period, 1870, mentioned in her book's subtitle. Taking further Vanita's interpretation, Khan advances in his Introduction, expressively subtitled "Space, Speech and Subjectivity in Jan Sahib's *Jashn-e-Benazir*", a ground-breaking reading of the text. Four discrete sections provide, in turn, an overview of the production of the text in the form of *rekhti* bound tightly to an actual historical event, namely the first celebration of the Festival ("The Economy and Politics of Literary Affect"); the role of royal patronage vs. performers, and the ethnographic character of the poetic account ("Patron and Performer: Ethnography of Poetic Speech"); the urban, bazaar, public nature of the Festival's enacting and the unreservedness of its

participants ("Women, Men and Transvestites"); the competitiveness of the bazaar culture where different acts of speech jostle with each other ("Marketplace of Speech"). As a result, we get an image of *rekhti* poetic piece as a literary artefact presenting a "word-picture of an entire social world" (Khan 2021: 7), but a piece which needs an audience to enjoy and appreciate it, with the poet, the reciter, and the listener, all bit players in the festivities of the marketplace. The way Khan puts it, "In the poem's narrative, Jan Sahib sits surrounded by all these participants as he recounts his observations which are matched by a commentary in visuals […] included in the manuscript, giving us a lyrical and visual archive of affect in a distinctively vernacular space," (*ibid.*: 5). And indeed, **the captain** and **the camel riders**[2] from the miniature painting on the book cover (of *Minority Pasts*), re-emerge now, like old friends, in the verses of *The Incomparable Festival*.

> The spring is on display with many wondrous colourants.
> The fair has stepped out in flowery accoutrements.
> **Even the mounties of the camel-riding artillery don colourful pigments.**
> **And stationed on his chair is the captain of the regiments.**
> The sepoys swoon when the women players start singing,
> Such gestures they make once their drums are drumming.
>
> (*ibid.*: 51; transl. Naved)

The public space of the bazaar attracts both the high and the low: the rulers and their courtiers, but also the money changers, opium sellers, sweeperesses (*bhanginen*) dressed to the nines and boldly strolling around, butchers, washermen, gardeners, male and female entertainers, and many other sellers and buyers of merchandise on offer. In this fairground open to all, "apart from the women's sphere, there is the disruptive world of vernacular gendered performance styles consisting of the male *ta'ifa* (dancer), *randi* (whore), *zanane* (effeminate), *hijda* (eunuch), *bhaand* (jester) and *rekhtigo* (Rekhti performer), including Jan Sahib himself, who are part of the transactions in the

[2] All highlights here and in the quoted stanzas are mine.

festive marketplace." (*ibid.*: 24). Of himself, a performer *par excellence*, "a purveyor of wordsmith skills", Jan Sahib writes:

> *pesh-e-nazar yeh rahta hai har aan* ***ta'ifa***
> ***mardaney ta'ifon*** *men 'Ali Jan* ***ta'ifa***
> *rakhta ziyada sab se hai yeh shaan ta'ifa*
> *is* ***ta'ife*** *pe aur ho qurban* ***ta'ifa***
> *sarkar ko hamaare yihi bas hansata hai*
> *jo nakhrey uske sunta hai khud lot jata hai*
>
> He remains forever in the mind among the **boy-dancers**.
> 'Ali Jan, the **boy-dancer**, among all **boy-dancers**.
> In lustre he exceeds all the other **boy-dancers**.
> In his place may be sacrificed all **boy-dancers**!
> Only he manages to tickle our royal master,
> Audiences of his tantrums double up with laughter.
>
> (*ibid.*: 25, transl. Naved)

One should keep in mind that in South Asia fairs were (and still are), "sites of entertainment, pleasure-seeking and popular culture that enriched and interrupted the patterns of everyday life." (*ibid.*: 7). The fair brought on the merry-making, and descriptions of its carnivalesque goings-on, couched in a colloquial, racy vernacular gratified the senses still further.

In Conclusion, speaking of "relationship between Islam, space, speech acts and processes of integration" (*ibid.*: 38) and the emergence of what Ahmed (2016) calls "trans-territorial category […] through the idea of circulation and shared aesthetics", Razak Khan poses an interesting question: "[W]hat about forms that do not travel or remain resolutely local? What might they teach us about locality, local speech and subjectivity?" (Khan 2021: 39). To contextualise the issue, let me quote from a recent book by Francesca Orsini (2023) which airs similar concerns. Discussing Sant orature, texts simultaneously mobile and local, she writes:

> Discussions of circulation, particularly in the context of world literature, tend to create an opposition, and a hierarchy, between texts that circulate and those that do not. After all, in David Damrosch's formulation, only the former qualify as world literature. But throughout this book, and particularly here, I suggest that we need to pay attention to both location and circulation as constitutive of, informing, and informed by literary texts. (*ibid.*: 100)

Taking note of the above, and without attempting to answer Khan's question posed earlier, one may rather contend, with pleasure, that the English rendering of the very local and localized text (dismissed by scholar of Urdu as "popular", "mass" and "low" literature), and even more so, its publication in the Penguin Classics series, has definitely put the text into circulation and on the map of world literature.

Shifting to a more personal tone, let me briefly turn to the translation. Being a translator myself, and a long-time subscriber to Levy's (2000) notion of "translation as a decision making process". I found it particularly fascinating to learn how Naved dealt with specific translatorial challenges and what systemic decisions he had to take while rendering the Urdu text into English. For instance, he shares with the readers his dilemma whether to settle on prose translation (more common for rendering Eastern poetry of late)[3] or opt for rhymes, and writes:

> In this translation of Jan Sahib's *Jashn-e-Benazir* […], I have chosen to represent the original's rhyme scheme. **The reason for this is not fidelity to the original**. In its particular case, the lengthy poem hangs together

[3] Naved (2021: 84) writes: "[…] perhaps the severest banishment of rhyme in recent years has occurred in translations from the Arabic, Persian and Urdu languages in which the orthodoxy of rhymed verse has prevailed for centuries. Milton's complaint against 'the jingling sound' of rhyme is taken all too seriously by translators when they render ghazals, masnavis and qasidas in free verse, or worse, summary in prose. While this choice could have aesthetic (perhaps to render the freshness of an old sensibility in more modern form) and/or disciplinary motives (perhaps to render literature more readable for writers of history), it has the profound result of serving a global language of English translation. A new orthodoxy replaces the old one."

> on the armature of rhyme and metre. It does not tell a story or elaborate a philosophical theme […]; it is a musaddas (a poem in six-line stanzas) used for commemorative or hortatory verse. (Naved 2021: 84).

Naved does, indeed, confess that in his English rendering "the rhymes are not always perfect" (*ibid.*: 85), but cannot be abandoned either, for as he explains, the rhyme scheme of the original acts as "the spine" of the whole poem. While the poem's each single Urdu stanza displays a "unity of theme, purpose and conceit", it is linked to other stanzas, on different themes, basically by way of "the six-line format, […] internal rhyme and uniform meter." Such a "spine" needs to be maintained in the translated text as well for the poem to "hold." Though, interestingly, Naved does accentuate the fact that modern translatorial choices (including his) are often dictated by demands made by English as global language.

* * *

In an age when history writing on South Asia often turns adversarially political, especially in the context of reading and re-evaluating Muslim presence in India, one can only marvel at the plethora of allusions inherent in the title of Razak Khan's book, *Minority Pasts: Locality, Emotions, and Belonging in Princely Rampur*. While plural in the *pasts* points to a whole range of *pasts*, defined in a variety of ways and existing despite homogenizing tendencies of the pan-regionally produced accounts, *minority* implies that those *pasts* relate to minority communities: religious, geographical, class or gender-based, etc. *Minority Pasts* as a phrase entail the existence of many *minorities* and many *pasts*, peripheral, local, not important in the larger scheme of things. *Rampur* locates them in a specific place, and *princely*—in specific time space. *Locality* combined with *emotions* and *belonging* hint at a discourse grounded in identity politics hingeing on *affect*, thus making for *affective community* tied by bonds reaching over time and space. Though Khan does not use the term *affective community* himself, he studies, what he calls, *affective archives*, which are for

him the "memory storehouses" that are routinely used both for the local/ised history projects as well as individual or group identity self-fashioning. The *affective history* of princely Rampur thus assembled is a chronological account spanning the period from 1857 (Mutiny) to 1949 (accession to the Indian Union) with a pioneering analysis of the post-1947 period when the *affective community* of the Rampuris came to be partitioned between India and Pakistan.

The book, which opens with an Introduction, is divided into five chapters, and closes with an Epilogue. It is further furnished with paratextual supplements, some prefacing the main text (List of Maps and Illustrations, List of Abbreviations, Acknowledgements, Note on Transcription), others appending it (Notes, Bibliography, and Index). The scope of his work is set up by the author thus,

> The present study examines the princely state of Rampur in the post-1857 British colonial period by focusing on the rule of Nawab Kalb-e-Ali Khan (r. 1865–1887), Nawab Hamid Ali Khan (r. 1889–1930), and his successor Nawab Raza Ali Khan (r. 1930–1949). Moving beyond the temporalities of princely rule, this book also looks at the history and trajectory of postintegration history of Rampur and Rampuris in postcolonial India. (Khan 2022: 2)

Chapter I, "Oasis in the Desert," notionally begins with the catastrophe of 1857 and its aftermath but Khan sees in "this historical moment […] an opportunity for the emergence in Rampur of a new kind of locality, i.e., the chief 'Muslim princely locality' in colonial United Provinces" (*ibid.*: 28). The reign of Nawab Yusuf Ali Khan (r. 1855–1865), and even more so, of his son, Nawab Kalb-e-Ali Khan, witness a new type of patronage and provide, under the guise of Rampur, a new 'Oasis in the desert' of the post-1857 dislocation" (*ibid.*: 30). Of the five sections of this chapter, the first outlays the notion of this "Oasis" in terms of cultural production and engagement; the second discusses the case of *Jashn-e-Benazir* and the role of the ruler, the townsmen and the bazaar in creating princely public culture (*ibid.*: 36); the third, Nawab Kalb-e-Ali's literary contribution in the form of "pil-

grimage text (*Hajjnama*) entitled *Qindil-e-Haram* (The Candle of the Sacred Sanctuary)" and written during Nawab's pious journey to Mecca in 1872 (*ibid.*: 40). The last two sections deal with the notion of Rampur's public culture and Urdu print culture, including Urdu newspaper production and circulation.

Chapter II, "Courtly Modernity", examines "the crucial transitional period" which saw "the first direct encounter between Rampur and colonial administration" (*ibid.*: 22), namely the colonial regency (1889–1896) which entailed British-controlled tutoring of the young ruler, Nawab Hamid Ali Khan, and his subsequent accession, in 1896. Though, according to Khan (*ibid.*: 55), Nawab Hamid Ali Khan's long reign is often viewed with nostalgia, it apparently witnessed adversarial and "contrasting articulations about Nawabi Rampur" formulated under the onslaught of "colonial, reformist, and nationalist politics of North India". While colonial writings labelled Rampur as "violent Rohilla locality," the middle-class Urdu-speaking Muslims saw it as "a decadent Nawabi locality", and the nationalist discourse as "a loyalist princely locality." There might have also been some Shia–Sunni undertones, with the aristocracy predominantly Shia and the population Sunni. The already discussed Nawabi festivals, *Jashn-e-Benazir*, praised in 1860s for generous patronage, were, by the end of the 19th-century (*ibid.*: 75), severely criticised, mostly on moral grounds, and discontinued. Moreover, the drawing of Rampur state and Nawab Hamid Ali Khan into the sphere of Muslim politics in United Provinces, mainly by reason of the Ali brothers' pan-Islamic agenda,[4] brought home the fact that Rampur no longer existed merely as a bounded geographical locality but was produced, re-produced and transformed through actors, practices and discourses which were often translocal.

Chapter III, "Princely Progress," deals with the reign of Nawab Raza Ali Khan (r. 1930–1949) which saw modernisation and democratisation of princely polity coupled with growth in the participation of

[4] Shaukat Ali (1873–1938) and Muhammad Ali Jauhar (1878–1931) were Muslim leaders, originally from Rampur, who played an important role in the politics of the time.

state subjects in governance and its articulations. It also saw, in 1947, India gain independence, though at the price of being partitioned into two nation-states, India and Pakistan, the last envisaged as a homeland for Muslims. Khan sensitively maps the last nineteen years of Rampur Nawabi state, its entry into the violent orbit of nationalist politics, Muslim separatism and Congress aspirations to pan-national representation, right up to the moment of Rampur's merger with the Indian Union on 1 December 1949. This last event saw Rampur being transformed overnight from a "modern, industrialised locality" into a peripheral "Muslim locality" of no importance.[5]

Chapter IV, "Locality, Genre, and Self-Definitions of Rampuris," reverses the gaze. While the earlier chapters "explored the political and cultural spaces of the princely court as well as popular public-arena-based politics," the current chapter "examines the ways in which Rampuri subjects understood and wrote about their locality, self-identification, and emotions" (*ibid.*: 156). The narrative is no longer focused on the ruler but his subjects and specifically, their literary production in Urdu. The aim is to examine the connection between the sense of place (Rampur) and identity (*Rampuri*), and the sense of belonging to a place, here Rampur (*Rampuriat*) (*ibid.*: 24). To this end Khan delves into the archive and examines various textual sources relevant to the period. He looks at three genres in particular: history (*tarikh*), biographical compendia (*tazkira*), and life writings (*hayat*). Here, of special interest to the scholar of life writings is the rare autobiographical memoir authored by a woman. The author in question, Begum Jahanara Habibullah (1915–2003), was a member of the princely family, born and brought up in Rampur; she migrated, with her husband, to Pakistan soon after Partition and settled in Karachi. Written almost at the end of Begum's life, originally in Urdu, the memoir,

[5] At the time of British withdrawal (15.8.1947), there were over 500 princely states (native states) comprising 40% of the territory and 20% of the population of the Indian subcontinent. Many of the largest states were Muslim (Hyderabad, Bhopal) and their integration with Indian Union came at a great cost. A Bhopal-based Muslim writer, Manzoor Ahtesham, writes about the influx of Punjabi refugees after Partition, which totally changed the nature of earlier Muslim localities.

"one of the affective nostalgic memoirs by an upper-class exile (*muhajir*)" (*ibid.*: 188), provides, among others, a peep into life in the *zenana* quarters of the princely family. Though written in Urdu, it was first published in English as *Remembrance of Days Past: Glimpses of a Princely State during the Raj*.[6] There is also an additional bonus: bibliographical details of another autobiographical account written by a woman of a similar background, namely Mehrunissa Khan (2006). Though this book is not discussed by Razak Khan, it does add to the treasure trove of life writings of the period.

Chapter V, "Princely Past, Subaltern Present. Memory, History, and Emotions," explores, to quote the author, "the postcolonial trajectories of the Muslim princely locality of Rampur and Rampuris in independent India as well as Pakistan" by looking closely at "a traffic in historical texts, memories and emotions among Rampuris across India-Pakistan national borders" (Khan 2022: 24). To this end, notions such as "nostalgia, melancholia, memory, remembrance, and forgetting" are mapped by delving into affective archives located around the writings and activities of four individuals, Rampuris by birth, two in India (Abid Raza Bedar, Shaair Ullah Khan) and two in Pakistan (Zakir Ali Khan in Karachi, and Saud ul Hassan Khan in Lahore). One of them, the *muhajir* Zakir Ali Khan, has authored an autobiography, *Mai-Baap* [Mother and Father], which, devoted as it is to the memory of his mother who brought him up singlehandedly after his father died, and later refused to move to Pakistan, is also a nostalgic memoir of the past. Even the title, which overtly refers to his mother as his *mai-baap*, parental figure beyond the mere parent, resonates with echoes of the more colloquial usage where the phrase refers to the various powers-to-be that take care of one. It thus, covertly, alludes also to the invisible presence of the princely protector acting as the ultimate guardian *in loco parentis* (*sarparast*) for the older generations of Rampuris.

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[6] The autobiography, translated by Tahira Naqvi, was first published in English (2001), and later (2003) in Urdu as *Zindagī kī yāden. Rīyasat Rāmpur kā navābī daur*.

Moving a step further, in an effort to better understand links and reasons that keep an individual bound to a place by invisible ties, one is tempted to examine one term which seems to be of utmost importance to Razak Khan's interlocutors, both textual and real. The word *watan* and its numerous phraseological constructs: *watan ki muḥabbat* (p. 177), *hubbu'l watan* (p. 201), *muhibb-e-watan*, *watan azizi* (p. 214), *wataniyat* (p. 219), *watan Rampur* (p. 177) or simply *mera watan* (p. 177) reappear again and again in writings of the period, in titles of newspapers or pamphlets, in names of associations, and in conversations. In each instance such a reference evokes in the speaker (writer), but also the listener (reader), strong feelings associated with the idea of home, locality, belonging, and love linked to a patch of soil one calls one's home/land. This, in Urdu context, as David Lelyveld (2003: 24) defines it, is 'the town or village where a person actually lived or to which one continuously returns.'

Having said that, let me take a personal detour. As a researcher and translator dedicated to mapping contours of the *watan* debate in the early post-Partition literature in Hindi, I have found that there have been heated, long-lasting polemics both around the term itself as well as the very concept of homeland, right from the early days of nationalist discourse as is evident in the writing of the Hindi-Urdu stalwart Premchand. In view of this, of special interest to me are the affinities between the Rampuri discourse and similar discussions present in the writings of Bhisham Sahni, Krishna Sobti, or Krishna Baldev Vaid, all of them with roots in West Punjab, now a part of Pakistan, with their *watan* beyond reach. For Krishna Sobti the true *watan* was always the land beyond the Ravi where her extended family had lived, and where both her *nanka* and *dadka* once were.[7] In fact, Sobti's autobiographical novel, *Gujrat Pakistan se Gujrat Hindustan* (2017), published when she was over eighty, opens with a labourers' ditty, overflowing, as the narrator tells us, with *hubbu'l watani*. This ditty, uttered

[7] In Punjabi: Households of maternal grandparents (*nanka*) and paternal grandparents (*dadka*)

in distinct, familiar *lehja*,[8] envelops the protagonist, a stand-in for the author, in a specific soundscape which evokes in her feelings of searing nostalgia for the homeland left behind. The English translation renders this *hubbu'l watani bol* as "patriotic song" inadvertently subverting affect inherent in author's words (which brim with meaning located beyond the dictionary) by way of a disengaged, non-emotive rendering.[9] To show that a reading which refuses to agree with translating something so full of affect as *hubbu'l watani* by the adjective "patriotic" is a demonstrable possibility, let me tell you a story. Decades ago, I was a student at Jamia Millia Islamia. All my classmates were Urdu speakers, most of madrasa background, with only a rudimentary knowledge of English. At the first get-together, when we were introducing ourselves, the formula which all my classmates employed to refer to the locality they thought of as home involved the word *watan*. So, they would say: *mera nam…. hai, mera watan Patna, mera watan Azamgarh, mera watan Sambhal…* which for me, a person from a well-defined nation-state in Europe, *watan* or "homeland" could have only meant a nation-state. This was an Urdu lesson I never forgot. In Razak Khan's study, it is precisely *this* inherent Urdu meaning of *watan*, meaning framed by a specific highly localized sentiment, that troubles his interlocutors and forces them to purposefully remould its implied sense in their writings to show how this love for *watan*—originally Rampur—could be transferred onto the new nation-state (cf. Chapter V).

Epilogue, evocatively subtitled "A City Named Rampur in the 'Muslim Belt' of Uttar Pradesh", gathers all disparate strands of this book-length study. It also provides brief remarks on the current status of Rampur and its inhabitants vs. the wider territory of the state (Uttar Pradesh) which it has become part of on accension (1949). By looking into "the historical production of locality, identification, and public culture through the local history of Rampur", the study has already

[8] See Khan 2022: 216, when speaking of the migrants in Pakistan today, the author says: 'Rampuris still manage to retain their distinct Urdu style (*lehja*) among other Muhajir communities.'

[9] For the Hindi original, see Sobti 2017: 9; for the English translation, Sobti 2021: 5.

amply demonstrated close "relationship between space, emotions, and subjectivity beyond the confines of nation and religious community" (Khan 2022: 223–224).

The research, from what reader is given to understand, was conducted largely through what may be best described as "an archival immersion" where archives comprised textual sources and oral communications, but also included spaces defined by their physicality: public and private libraries, public and private meeting places. So, before signing off, I would like to stop for a moment at Rampur libraries. As noted in the book and other writings of the author (Khan 2014), after the migration of its founders to Pakistan, Saulat Public Library, which, besides Raza Library, is the other Rampur library Khan uses for his research, was left in dire straits, with no financial support to be had from the authorities (*ibid.*). Having visited the library probably in the same decade as Khan, Daniel Majchrowicz, a scholar who works on 19th- and 20th-century Urdu travelogues (*safarnama*s), offers, right on the first page of his recent book, an account of his introductory call at the library. The library was still functioning, but a back wall had just come down in the rains and lots of books were destroyed. "The travelogue section was one of the causalities." Whatever could be salvaged, was moved to an adjoining dingy room, "with hundreds of books piled about at random" (Majchrowicz 2023: 1). After sifting through the piles for a week, Majchrowicz reports that he managed to find dozens of colonial-era travelogues. But what he found most striking, and which is the reason for bringing in his account here is the fact, that most of the travelogues in Saulat's collection were local productions, authored by Rampuris and printed in Rampur.

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